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By Henry Bury p. 2  
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What better way to welcome a new family to the Friendly City than with a bouquet of blooms?

It was 40 years ago that Laura Hagerman asked Barber's Flowers Ltd. to join Welcome Wagon as a sponsor.

And for 35 of those years, she personally delivered Welcome Wagon baskets, including those blooming Barber's flowers, to newcomers in Belleville.

She said Monday she would still be carrying out her Welcome Wagon hostess duties if not for a hip operation five years ago.

Hagerman, now 103, opened her apartment door at the Hagerman Block, 186 1/2 Front St. for a special celebration Monday afternoon.

Welcome Wagon presented Barber's Flowers with a special plaque to mark its 40-year involvement as a business sponsor.

Anne MacKinnon, Barber's owner-manager, was on hand to receive the plaque.

"It's an honour for us to be involved with Welcome Wagon for the past 40 years and this recognition makes it even more special," she said.

The flower shop at 122 Front St., which was established in 1890 by her great great grandfather, S.S. Potter, has been presenting two carnations to every newcomer to Belleville visited by Welcome Wagon.

Joining Welcome Wagon made good business sense, she said.

"It's a way of getting our name out there to newcomers in our community. We want to make them feel welcome in our store and our community," said MacKinnon, adding her store's involvement with the program will continue for many years to come.

Hagerman admired the plaque and recalled how she signed the original contract with Barber's Flowers in 1963 to provide colourful carnations to newcomers into the city.

Hagerman was a Welcome Wagon hostess for a record 50 years.

She ran the Esquire Grille below her current apartment until the

early 1950s. She sold the business and joined Welcome Wagon to keep herself busy — and keep busy she did for a half century.

"I enjoyed welcoming new people to Belleville and I probably would have been still working if I didn't break my hip when I was 98," she laughed.

Hagerman is an inspiration to Welcome Wagon, say local hostesses.

"Laura is a role model for all Welcome Wagon hostesses because we all adore her," said Catherine Murray, a hostess for the past four years.

Her comments were echoed by the newest hostess, Phyllis Leddy.

"She is a role model because of her perseverance and success over her 50 years with Welcome Wagon," she said.

Welcome Wagon was established in Canada in 1930 and the organization dedicated to welcoming newcomers into the community has been operating in Belleville for more than 50 years.

Local businesses financially sponsor Welcome Wagon. They also provide such gifts as fresh flowers, cookies, candies and candles, and invitations that go inside special baskets that are delivered by hostesses to their clients.

Hostesses make between 30 and 40 visits a month to new individuals

and families moving into the city.

"The challenge is finding new people to Belleville," said hostess Murray. "Anyone can phone Welcome Wagon and provide the names of newcomers and we will look after the rest."

The Welcome Wagon phone number is 967-8780.

Gloria York, Welcome Wagon's area manager, said participating businesses receive many benefits from the program.

"It gives the business a community identity and we wish more businesses would participate with Welcome Wagon and make newcomers even more welcome in their respective communities," said York.