

Auxiliary pioneer is one of the million dollar girls



By Tracey Coveart
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On November 23, 1952, some 40 women gathered together to form a hospital auxiliary and Noreen Malcolm was among them. In fact, it was Noreen, Durham County's representative on the Hospital Board - and the only woman - who was given the job of canvassing the area to find at least two ladies from each of Blackstock, Cadmus, Epsom, Greenbank, Honeydale, Manchester, Nestleton, Port Perry, Prince Albert, Prospect, Scugog Island, Seagrave, Shirley and Utica who were interested in "bringing comfort to our patients, whether it is done by a friendly smile or by buying much needed equipment."

Fifty-six years later and just a few months shy of her 85th birthday, Noreen Malcolm - fondly known by most as Toots (the name her father gave her for the first month of her life) - is still on the job, greeting patients for day surgery with a warm hello and a friendly hug and helping to keep the hospital auxiliary a strong and effective volunteer presence in Port Perry.

When that group of ladies first met in an unfinished room of the soon-to-be-opened Community Memorial Hospital on Lilla St. (now The Villa), no one had any experience in a hospital auxiliary. But they were willing to learn - and to work.

"We were very pleased," said Noreen, then just a young wife moved back to the farm from Brooklin. "They worked most willingly and successfully and the things they did were unbelievable."

Committees were established for sewing, purchasing and planning. Showers were held and roll calls were answered with supplies. On Jan. 7, 1953 - Opening Day for Community Memorial Hospital at which Noreen was honoured to help cut the ribbon - the cupboards were filled with 53 pillow slips, 96 tea towels, 112 face cloths, 112 hand towels, one and a half cases of toilet soap, and 900 jars of preserved fruits, jams and jellies.

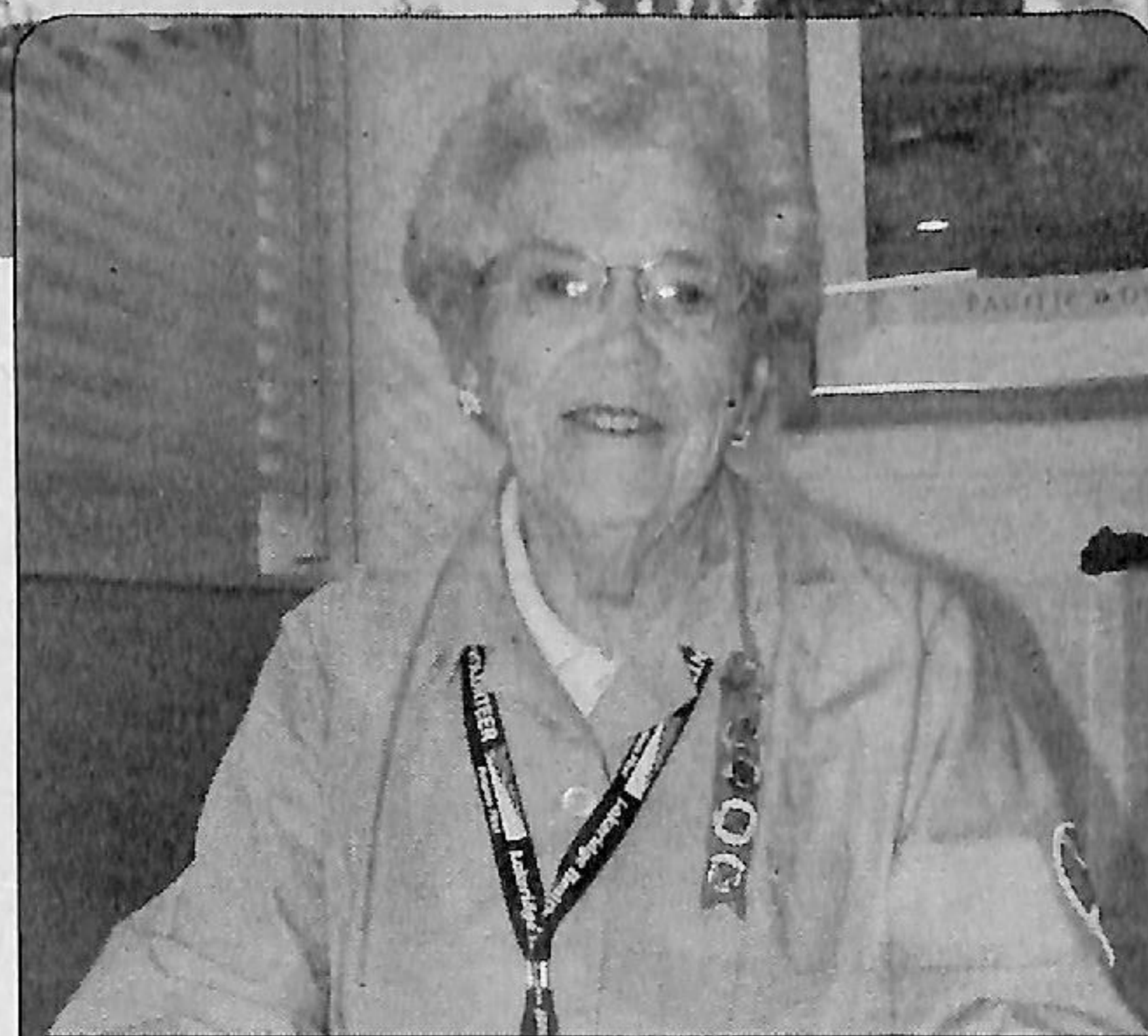
"What we did then would be really illegal nowadays," said Noreen. "Everything would have to be sterilized."

Among countless other items that were readied for that auspicious day, the sewing committee had cut and sewn 150 baby gowns, 50 bed pan covers, 60 bundle covers for sterilization, 85 baby sheets, surgical stockings, basin covers, crib protectors, quilted pads, perineal sheets and surgical drape sheets.

Over the next few years the ladies worked tirelessly, completely outfitting the children's ward, purchasing operating room lights, a deep freezer for the kitchen, a suction machine, Mayo table, obstetrical table, portable suction machine, electrocardiogram and many other pieces of equipment - large and small.

The auxiliary purchased green linen and the sewing committee made gowns, caps and foot coverings for the doctors and nurses in the Operating Room, who appeared in their scrubs on March 17, 1958.

Mending groups were formed, and each Wednesday through to the 1980s a group of ladies would bring their thimbles to the hospital and work late into the night to mend and patch the torn linen. Tasked with keeping the



Auxiliary members like Noreen 'Toots' Malcolm have raised more than \$1 million for Port Perry's hospital.

linen cupboard stocked until 1957, several members held regular afternoon and evening linen showers to which all members were invited. At one auxiliary meeting, 150 tea towels and 140 dishcloths were turned in.

To raise money, the auxiliary accepted donations from organizations and individuals, and held an endless procession of dances, Spring Fairs, Fall Bazaars, Strawberry Socials, Doll Draws (an annual Christmas project that ran for 25 years starting in 1953), Mile of Dimes, the Million Penny Project (which raised \$12,954.87 in pennies in two years), Penny Draws (which ran spring and summer from 1954 to 1968), travelling prizes, forfeit calendars, bake sales, luncheon and cards, travelling aprons (sew a pocket on an apron, tuck a donation into the pocket and pass it on), live auctions, garden bulb sales, grocery tape collections, and the very popular Diminishing Teas, in which members charged two or three couples 25 cents for tea and cards and those couples all did the same and so on.

Sometimes, there was a specific goal, such as furnishing the Matron's office in 1952 for \$300. For this project, the auxiliary members held a variety of special events: hot dog (15 cents) and sandwich (two for 15 cents) lunches at school, a lucky draw for a donated bicycle; bingo parties at school (10 cents per game); pie and box socials; euchre parties with crokinole for the children; potluck suppers; and picture shows put on by travelling friends.

The auxiliary's first Tag Day was held in 1968 to replace the Penny Drive, which had been ongoing for 15 years. Members canvassed Port Perry's main street and raised \$106.60.

The gift shop was opened on Sept. 23, 1969, and turned a profit of \$389.92 in its first three months.

In 1971, the auxiliary received approval for a Candy Strippers program. The auxiliary supplied uniforms and paid the four teen volunteers 50 cents for an evening meal during their four-hour shift. By September of 1973, the Candy Strippers had logged a total of 2,081 hours and by 1990 included 22 female Candy Strippers and one male. (The program was disbanded on June 1, 2001.)

In April of 1976, the auxiliary held its first wildly popular

Fashion Show. So many people crammed into the auditorium that after all the printed tickets were sold auxiliary members began to tear strips of paper into tickets to accommodate the overflow. Joel Aldred, a television and radio announcer who lived in the area, served as commentator and the event raised \$1,576.13.

In 1982, The Ladies' Auxiliary was renamed the Hospital Auxiliary and male volunteers were welcomed into the fold. (The name changed again in 1997 to Auxiliary of North Durham Health Services Port Perry, and again - to the Auxiliary to Lakeridge Health, Port Perry - when the auxiliary became one of five belonging to the Lakeridge family after amalgamation in August 1998.)

Tag Day became Tag Days in 1982, and 1,480 tags were sold for a total collection of \$1,013.57. In 1991, 28 members and three husbands netted \$2,464 over the two days and a three-day blitz in 2000 added \$8,000 - an all-time high - to the auxiliary coffers.

The auxiliary also holds a number of lotteries, including the Hospital Equipment Lottery Project for People (HELPP), which raised \$18,475 in its first six years, and the \$20 lottery calendar, which started in 1998 and made a profit of \$33,830 in three years.

In 1999, the auxiliary partnered with a television service company to have TVs installed at each bedside and auxiliary members began connecting patients to cable 365 days a year through the In-hospital Adult Volunteer Program started in 1975.

From 1962 to 2001, auxiliary members distributed 6,281 pairs of booties to babies born at the hospital, as well as 58 centennial spoons and six sweater/bonnet/bootie sets for twins. Since 1991, the auxiliary has also awarded an annual bursary to a teen volunteer or graduating high school student going on to advanced studies in the medical field.

It was Noreen Malcolm who started the annual Blackstock Fish Fry in honour of the auxiliary's 50th anniversary in 2002.

"Each community had to do something to bring people all together," said Noreen. "Seagrave had a games night. Scugog Island had a fashion show. Prince Albert had a euchre party. Epsom decorated miniature Christmas trees for sale in the gift shop. Nestleton had a 'strictly illegal' Bingo. And I started the Fish Fry. We've been holding it for five years now."

All of these fundraising initiatives have produced almost unbelievable results.

The auxiliary pledged \$20,000 to the new Paxton St. hospital in 1969, \$50,000 for the Matthew B. Dymond addition in 1984, \$75,000 in 1993 for the Stephen B. Roman Wing, and \$250,000 to the current 'Lighting the Way!' campaign. And in its first 50 years, the auxiliary donated \$624,235 worth of new equipment.

"This is a group of women who have raised well over a million dollars," said Scugog Mayor Marilyn Pearce. "They're the fundraisers for all the capital equipment that isn't funded by the government."

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