

Adults fit in at AHS

Apprehension and uneasiness soon turn to enthusiasm and contentment for adults who return to high school to further their education.

Acton's secondary school currently has 15 adult students, three of whom are attending classes full time. Most are taking just one or two subjects to either brush up or learn new skills required for a potential job, or in at least one case, to prepare for changes in the present job.

Sue Burns, of the Students Services department explains adults wishing to return to school have an advantage over regular students in that they receive credits for "life experiences." Many who come back only have to complete four credits to get the grade. Some just return to improve skills, but to obtain a credit, exams must be taken.

Everything from data processing to drafting and auto mechanics are taken by the 15. Those heading towards a diploma are also taking English and Math, Ms. Burns says.

The adults at first are afraid of fitting in with the students, Ms. Burns observes. But after a few weeks they have gotten used to a school routine, and enjoy the contact with the teenagers who can be very supportive and helpful. Work doesn't seem as difficult after a while also.

Joan Waldie

Joan Waldie takes biology with Dave Jones, and is in the same class as her daughter Lillian. In fact, she says it was Lillian who encouraged her to go back to school to take a subject in which she was always interested.

Mrs. Waldie retired last fall after more than 15 years as owner and operator of Maple View Lodge rest home. As with most retirees, she experienced feelings of uselessness. However, now she can't get enough of school. She started in February.

Mrs. Waldie admits the first 10 days were the worst. She was in a panic and felt strange. But one day she walked into the classroom and felt a glimmer of hope. Since then every day has been "an exhilarating experience" and a "tremendous feeling."

Classes are five days a week for 85 minutes and she considers every minute of it a privilege to work with the teachers and students.

If everything works out this time around, Mrs. Waldie says she hopes to take English and sociology in the fall.

Does having her mother in her class seem strange to Lillian? Probably not as strange as Mrs. Waldie feels when she sees her grandson going from class to class.

Bill McGrath

Bill McGrath was forced to drop out of his engine rebuilding class until September. As a Halton Regional Police officer, his duties were changed, which changed his shifts.

However, since his first class last September, he's been enjoying himself immensely. The first day of school, he recalls, the students were very quiet, trying to figure out who he was. But after he introduced himself the ice was broken.

McGrath already has a grade 12 Arts and Science diploma but he wanted to learn something about engines and cars. A night school course did not offer everything he wanted to learn, so he decided to return to school. He was in the classroom an hour a day, five days a week.

McGrath feels an adult in the class has a stabilizing effect on the other students. He also pointed out an adult pupil is there because he wants to be, not because he has to be.

Judy Auty

A typing course squeezed into her lunch hour is Judy Auty's ticket to improving herself for her present job.

Mrs. Auty is resource centre secretary at Acton High School. In February, with the start of the second semester, she decided to take the typing which leads into word processing. She explained computers are going to be introduced into the resource centre and she wanted to be ready for them. She also wanted to be prepared for any other job available to her. In addition to her day course, she's also taking computers at night.

Mrs. Auty noted the electronic typewriters of today are a far cry from the manual machines she first learned on 25 years ago. It's hard to undo years of bad habits she confessed and she has to relearn the entire process.

Having her mother sit in front of her for 70 minutes a day doesn't bother Susan Auty as long as she doesn't act like a Mom.

Shelly Baum

Shelly Baum is getting ready to go back into the workforce after an 18-year absence. In September she took typing and is now in a data processing class. It didn't take very long to remember her typing skills she pointed out. She plans to continue in September, taking accounting and marketing. Her daughter is in grade 12, but in none of her classes.

All four adults are pleased with their decisions to return to school and would not hesitate to take more courses.

Ms. Burns points out now is the time to start considering classes for September. She is available to discuss plans with mature students, and will assess individual needs, backgrounds and plans. Principal Karl Sury is also available for advice.

The courses are free, Ms. Burns notes, and while there is no limit in the adults in the school, there is a limit to the size of classes.



Shelly Baum is preparing to return to the work force.



Bill McGrath will be returning to Acton High School in the fall.

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Judy Auty is taking typing in her lunch hour.