

## Georgetown's 'Newfie' community

# Newfoundland will always be their home

**By LORI TAYLOR**  
Herald staff writer

The two areas may be separated by about 1,500 miles, but Georgetown has a little piece of Newfoundland right in its back yard.

It doesn't look very different from its surroundings, but the hall at Unit 4, 247 Armstrong Avenue, is probably the heart of Georgetown's community of Newfoundlanders. As far as the members of the Newfoundland club are concerned, there is no such thing as an ex-Newfoundlander, and when they meet at the hall, club president Brian Hill says, the talk usually turns to stories and tall tales from "back home."

Most of the Newfoundlanders who ended up in Georgetown originally came from Bell Island, a small island off the provincial capital of St. John's. The men were employed at the Wabana Mines, the largest iron ore mines in the world at the time, but in 1959, the mines began to close down, because of competition from mining operations in Labrador.

Lloyd Bennett, vice-president of the club, said the mining operations on Bell Island produced a ton of iron ore for \$13, but Labrador could produce 13 tons for \$1, and the island operation was forced to close. The lay-offs began in 1959, with the plant finally closing up in 1966.

Most of the Newfoundlanders migrated to Ontario, looking for work. They settled in Toronto, Brampton, Georgetown and Galt for the most part. Galt has one of the largest populations of expatriate Newfoundlanders, with sufficient membership for two clubs.

Mr. Bennett said the majority of the Newfoundlanders in the area go home for a visit every two years or so.

"It's a nice place to visit, but there's no work there," Mr. Bennett said. "Newfoundland is home, like people who came from Europe call it 'The Old Country'. Home is where the heart is. We're here for economic reasons."

The Georgetown chapter of the Newfoundland Club was formed unofficially in 1963, with the first of a series of dances, held at Holy Cross auditorium around Christmas.

The dances were held in different locations for the next few years. The club received its charter in 1973, and moved to the Riviera Club (now the Way-Jay) in Norval in 1974.

About 45 or 50 families came up from Bell Island after the mines closed, "and we wanted some place to meet, because we were all strangers," club member Dick Sutton said. Membership was as high as 120 families while the club was in the Riviera Club, but it dropped off later when the club found itself temporarily homeless again. The membership is up again to 75 families. It's not necessary to be from Newfoundland to belong to the club; membership is open to anyone for \$15 a year per family, but in order to hold an office, the member must be from Newfoundland, descended from a Newfoundlander, or married to someone from Newfoundland.

The club found their present hall early in 1978, but had to go through a lot of red tape to get permission to go ahead, because the area is zoned industrial. It took nine months to get the proposal approved by the committee of adjustment, and a total of 1 1/2 years to get the hall ready for the opening two weeks ago.

All the work in the hall was done by club members, except for the plumbing. The club is a non-profit organization, and many of the expenses the members incurred along the way to getting the hall ready to open came out of their own pocket.

The hall will be used by the club as a gathering place for playing cards, darts or other games, and just sitting around to talk with friends. The hall has a special occasion liquor licence, which they hope to have changed to a permanent licence by this fall. The hall is available for rent by any group.

**DONATIONS**  
The club has donated funds to different organizations, including the North Halton Association for the Mentally Retarded, Georgetown and District Memorial Hospital and the Ontario Society for Crippled Children.

The club has its own baseball team, and hockey team, and hopes to sponsor minor hockey and baseball teams. Mr. Hill said that the club members would be happy to assist at any functions organized by the town.

Courtesy and helping others are common traits among Newfoundlanders. Mr. Bennett said.

"If you're in a laneway, wanting to pull out on to the

road, and a car's coming, and the driver stops and waves you out, you can figure he's from down east," Mr. Bennett said. "The Newfie motto is 'It's always tomorrow'."

**DIFFERENT ATMOSPHERE**  
Mr. Hill, who has lived all his life in Georgetown, but is married to a Newfoundlander, says it's a different atmosphere in Newfoundland. Everybody speaks to visitors and is friendly to his neighbors and no doors are locked, he said.

"It's an insult to a Newfoundlander if he invites you into his home and you refuse," Mr. Hill said.

With Newfoundlanders going back for regular visits, it's easy to monitor the changes at home; but while the province is changing, Mr. Bennett said, it's not changing very fast.

"and the lifestyle is still the same."

The impetus as far as employment goes, seems to be to move people into farming, Mr. Hill said. Bell Island, which once had a population of 14,000 people, now has only 7,000, and the majority of them are working in St. John's or the surrounding area.

"Most of the people from Bell Island were miners," Mr. Bennett said. "Most people, when they think of Newfoundland, think of fishermen. But the mines on Bell Island were the biggest iron ore mines in the world. They went way out under the ocean floor. You've got miners, you've got fishermen, you've got loggers, and you've got businessmen, just like in the rest of Canada."

Mr. Bennett said that on at least one occasion, he has

visited a school to talk about Newfoundland, because "it's interesting to let people know some things they might not know about Newfoundland. For example, a lot of people from Portugal say the landscape in Newfoundland is very much like the landscape of Portugal."

While Newfoundland didn't join Canada until 1949, it did play an important part in the Allied war effort, with a number of bases located around the island, since it was the closest point to Europe. Conception Bay was the spot where convoys were formed to send the ships over in groups, for protection from German U-boats, Mr. Bennett said.

"I remember watching all the ships come in," he said. Four ore freighters were sunk in the harbor off Bell Island by

German U-boats, and on a calm day, visitors can see the hulks still resting where they sank. They can also visit the cemetery on Bell Island and see the tombs of those missing after the four freighters were sunk.

"There's more history in one part of Newfoundland than there is in the rest of Canada," Mr. Bennett said. He pointed out that Newfoundland was the only part of Canada which joined Confederation as a sovereign state, and not as a colony.

**SOVEREIGN STATE**  
"The difference is, the way British Columbia joined, their off-shore oil belongs to the federal government," he said. "Because Newfoundland was a sovereign state, her off-shore oil belongs to her."

Some of the families which settled in this area have gone back to Newfoundland once the husbands retire, Mr. Bennett said, while others with family ties in the area stay put.

"A lot of people came up here, not planning to stay because all their friends were back home," he said. "But then they went back for a two-week visit, and they couldn't wait to get back here because all their friends are up here now."

"They were once very much the style, but 'Newfie' jokes aren't heard too often any more. But to talk to members of the club, the jokes weren't terribly offensive."

"Most Newfie jokes are told by Newfies," Mr. Hill said. "Some of the stories that come out of Newfoundland, well, they have you dying laughing."

Mr. Hill is not a Newfoundland himself, but sometimes, he starts to feel like one, he said.

"Being around Newfies all the time, you get into their ways," he said. "When you get into a group, and everybody's talking and telling stories, you start talking like a Newfie soon enough."

"From town to town in Newfoundland, you get a different accent," Mr. Bennett said. "Up here, to a Newfoundlander, people from Ontario sound foreign."

Mr. Bennett may have summed up the position of Georgetown's Newfoundlanders best. "Newfoundlanders have a certain comradeship," he said. "We're like other ethnic groups in Canada. We're just an ethnic group of Canadians."



BILL VANDENBERG  
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**SO LONG, AL**

Staff and students contributed for this ceramic statue and a decanter as a farewell gift to Park Public School's principal, Al Leaper, who is leaving the school for another school in south Halton.

(Herald photo)

**PHOTO SEMINARS**  
Mountsberg Wildlife Centre will be holding seminars on photographing wildlife this weekend with expert nature photographers talking about photography and answering questions. The fee is \$1.50 per car, and the seminars begin at 2 p.m. both Saturday July 7 and Sunday July 8.

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