

Little known but common disease

# Acton's Pat McKenzie seeks ALS chapter

By MAGGIE HANNAH  
Herald Special  
Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) is a disease which isn't well known in Canada, although it afflicts more people than muscular dystrophy and perhaps even more than multiple sclerosis.

G.W. (Pat) McKenzie, former school principal and municipal politician, has found out the difficulties of living with ALS the hard way and he wants to help educate people about the disease.

ALS causes the spinal nerves to malfunction. Put simply, the nerves stop the flow of messages to the muscles and the body stops functioning properly. Other muscles compensate but eventually deterioration sets in.

Mr. McKenzie found he was walking "like a drunk"; he wanted his feet to go but they wouldn't move properly. Although his is centred in his legs, Mr. McKenzie said other ALS victims have difficulty with their upper limbs and some ultimately become bed-ridden or confined to a wheelchair.

Mr. McKenzie went to his doctor last spring to have a spur removed from his heel. By the time the surgeon finished the operation, he suspected the diagnosis and sent Mr. McKenzie to Guelph neurologist Dr. Ranjit Singh. Dr. Singh confirmed the diagnosis and Pat McKenzie's battle was on.

Doctors tell their patients to go home and put their lives in order because when ALS strikes, their lives will change dramatically as muscles deteriorate.

Mr. McKenzie isn't the passive type to accept such advice and wanted to know how to fight ALS, which has no known cure.

ALS has been recognized since the 1800s but no cause has been found nor any reliable form of treatment.

Mr. McKenzie takes minerals to supplement his diet. He rides a stationary bicycle to get exercise and he's receiving acupuncture treatments weekly from Dr. Leslie MacKray at Portageville, near Schomberg. Acupuncture won't cure his illness, but since ALS is a deterioration of muscles and nerves, the stimulation of acupuncture won't do any harm, Mr. McKenzie's doctor told him.

ALS strikes mainly between the ages of 40 and 70. More men have the disease than women and it strikes most commonly at very active people. The disease may progress very rapidly or very slowly. It may even hit

plateaus during which time the patient sees no great change. Mr. McKenzie says he has no pain. He is frustrated to find so many things he once took for granted are now difficult or impossible.

He uses a quad cane to walk and tires quickly. He has had hand controls installed on his car since September so that he could make long drives, like a trip to his daughter's home near Collingwood, without concern that his legs would tire and cramp on the road.

He joined the Acton Y men's club in 1940 and served as international president of the club in 1964-65. He is still a member and co-ordinates student scholarships across Canada for the organization.

In 1966 he began a political career and served as deputy-revee and reeve of Acton and five years on regional council.

He was a member of the Halton Region Conservation Authority for six years until he switched to the foundation in 1981. He is also a member of the Halton Housing Authority.

His latest interest is in forming an Ontario chapter of the ALS Society if one doesn't already exist. So far, the California office with which he's been corresponding hasn't supplied him with that information and as a result he hopes any ALS victims interested in forming a chapter will contact him by writing G.W. McKenzie, 163 Jeffrey Ave., Acton.

—Courtesy Guelph Mercury



PAT MCKENZIE

If he sits or lies too long in one position, his legs cramp and he has to get up and move around.

He's annoyed, for example at having to leave shovelling his driveway to his wife Mary.

While the kindness his neighbors have shown in driving Mrs. McKenzie is very touching, Mr. McKenzie also gets impatient with his own handicap. Last week, for example a neighbor came over in his car to pick him up to come over for an evening of cards. At one time, Mr. McKenzie wouldn't have dreamed of accepting a ride across the street just because the wind was a bit strong. Now he has to accept it or stay home. If he fell he couldn't get up, he said.

His doctor advised him to head south to a warmer climate and soon he'll be off to Florida.

Doctors advised Mr. McKenzie to keep active as long as possible. Depression is a problem in the beginning but less so since he began working on a history of Trinity United Church to keep occupied.

He also personally canvassed door-to-door for a couple of hours in December for signatures on a petition protesting the use of taxes to retain Acton's old town hall.

Mr. McKenzie arrived in Acton in 1939 as principal of Robert Little public school and retired from the post in 1973. He was absent from 1943-45 to serve in the Royal Canadian Air Force.

# Fellowship presented by Governor-General Research award for botanist

Herald Special  
An Acton area scientist has topped 47 nominees to receive one of four major research fellowships granted to outstanding researchers in Canada.

Michele Heath, a botany professor at the University of Toronto, and the first woman to receive the E.W.R. Steacie Memorial Fellowship from the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, will spend the next two years working on ways of combating rust fungi that attacks crops.

One of only a dozen female plant pathologists in the world, Mrs. Heath's research is aimed at discovering why some fungi are successful in attacking one plant while another plant fights them off.

She and her colleagues around the world have already discovered how plants protect themselves. Now she wants to know why that defence mechanism doesn't always work.

Plant breeding can be done to combat rust fungi parasites, she said, but that's only a temporary answer. Eventually the fungi will produce a strain that overcomes the

plant's resistance. The long-term cure would be to find out what makes that resistance fail and then correct that problem.

Mrs. Heath presently splits her time between laboratory research and teaching 1,500 first-year university students.

Thanks to the fellowship, the university can hire a replacement teacher for two years and let her devote herself entirely to her research. In addition to the award equalling the fellow's salary NSERC also gives research grants.

A native of Bournemouth, England, Mrs. Heath was educated at Westfield College, University of London and Imperial College.

Following two years of post-doctoral work in plant pathology at the University of Georgia, she came to Toronto in 1971. She was accepted as professor last year.

In 1979 Mrs. Heath received the Huxley Memorial Medal from the Imperial College (London) for research achievement and last year she became one of

four senior editors of Physiological Plant Pathology.

Mrs. Heath, her husband Brent, and their five-year old daughter have lived on the Halton Hills-Milton town line for seven years.

Mrs. Heath isn't the only researcher in the family. Her husband, a cell biology professor at York University was unsuccessfully nominated for the same fellowship last year.

award from Governor General Edward Schreyer in Ottawa. The coveted fellowships are the NSERC's most prestigious awards and are annually presented to outstanding young researchers in Canadian universities.

—Courtesy Guelph Mercury  
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