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Friends and family along with members of the Red Hat Society attended a wake hosted by Acton's Amy Sloan, 68, on Sunday. She has six to eight weeks to live.

Photos by Ray Lavender

Acton woman celebrates life by hosting her own wake

By **MELANIE HENNESSEY**
Special to The IFP

World traveller. Business woman. Member of the Red Hat Society. Miss congeniality. Amazing sister, aunt and friend.

While these are all hats that Acton's Amy Sloan has literally and figuratively worn throughout her 68 years, she will now also be known as the woman with the unique idea to hold her own wake when she's still alive.

That's just what Sloan did on Sunday, when dozens of her family members, friends and neighbours came together for the afternoon to celebrate her life and all that she's accomplished.

"I'm having a wake because I'm still awake," she said with a smile from the party room at the Lakeview Villa seniors' building in Acton. "I wanted to say goodbye to everyone personally."

Sloan has been diagnosed with terminal esophagus and liver cancer. Two weeks ago, she was given six to eight weeks to live.

While many who are given such a diagnosis don't go on to plan social functions, let alone their own wake, the concept was very well received by those in attendance.

"I would rather come today than when it's too late. Good for Amy," said family friend John Busser, who's known Sloan since childhood after their parents immigrated to Canada from Europe on the same boat decades ago.

He described Sloan as a woman who's "full of life" — a portrayal that she surely lived up to on Sunday.

Decked out in her favourite colour — purple — as were her guests, Sloan chatted, laughed and even managed to get up and dance while her family serenaded her with two of her favourite

songs, '80s hit "Gloria" and "I've Had the Time of my Life" from the movie *Dirty Dancing*.

"I'm excited about the life that I've had," said Sloan. "I've travelled everywhere. I've loved every job I've had. I've loved my family and friends. I have no regrets."

Sloan was born in Germany and raised in Holland. After immigrating to Canada, she, her parents, two sisters and one brother settled in Windsor and later moved to Oakville.

Her childhood friends from Oakville, who attended the wake, described Sloan as a person with a heart of gold who always had a flair for the dramatic.

"Amy always had spirit; the spirit to change things, and spirit to achieve," said friend Denise Morgan.

Sloan has certainly achieved a lot throughout her life, including starting her own office service and property management company and serving as president of the Oakville, Milton and District Real Estate Board for two years.

She's travelled extensively and lived abroad in places like Belgium, Paris and London. After returning to North America, she called Florida her home up until a decade ago, when she was diagnosed with colon cancer and had a stroke. No longer able to afford the expensive health insurance in the States, she sold her property and moved back to Canada.

Over the years Sloan was married twice and said she currently has a "special friend," Don, who's a fellow resident at Lakeview Villa. While she never had children, she holds the beloved title of Aunt Amy with her six nieces and nephews and their children.

"My kids love their Auntie Amy," said niece Tracey Koskela tearfully.