

Memories on ice

Milton Curling Club celebrates 40 years

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JENNIFER ENRIGHT

Today, as members of the Milton Curling Club look back in their 40th year, they can reflect on a successful four decades of changes – in that time, women finally got the chance to vote for the executive officers of the club, and the club went from being a non-voluntary organization to one run almost entirely by volunteers.

These changes will probably be much talked about during the club's birthday bash. The 40th anniversary celebrations take place at the club on October 16 from 7 p.m. until 10 p.m. and along with the usual socializing, members are hoping that people will get a chance to reminisce. To make that easier for people, the club is hoping to get existing and former members to bring along memorabilia, whether it's photos; equipment; old member's directories, pins or newspaper articles to make the club's past come alive.

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Some aspects of that past are already fairly well known to many, particularly the club's well-documented search for a home. Before the Milton Curling Club came into existence in the early 1960s, curling was a sport enjoyed

"IT'S AN AMAZING SOCIAL ATMOSPHERE"

by many, but it was a sport without a permanent residence in town.

In the early 1900s, according to a history of the club written by Don Kennedy, there was an outdoor curling rink on the north side of Mill Street, where Garden Lane leads back to Rotary Park. In those days, the facilities for curlers were simple; by the rink sat a "shabby, red building with a high peaked roof" that looked over two sheets of ice for curling. The curlers shared their space with spectators watching hockey games who "stood on the curling ice, since there was no room for seating."

For some reason not mentioned in Mr. Kennedy's account, the Mill St. rink was demolished and a busy period began for the town's curlers who were forced to travel elsewhere to engage in their sport. Trips to neighbouring towns

such as Guelph, Brampton, and Toronto weren't uncommon.

The club, though it existed prior to the 1960s, wasn't officially established until 1964 when construction began on the current clubhouse located at 65 Millside Drive. One person who remembers those days is long-time member Mel Phelps, who served as the third president from 1970 to 1971. He can recall the site of the club as just "vacant land before the club got it." "It cost \$132,000 to build the building and buy the property. We had 192 male curlers who played. Each of them purchased a \$150 debenture that was to give us our down payment on the mortgage."

During the 1980s, the club changed the requirement that kept women from voting for its directors. And, as part of another important change, the club opted to become a primarily volunteer organization. For members, it was a matter of survival that prompted them to make that decision back in 1969. They figured, as Mel says, if they wanted to pay for their mortgage then they would need to do more of the work themselves.

That reliance on volunteers hasn't changed. Kim Thomas, who has been a member for 25 years, believes that the emphasis on helping out has actually made for a better club, one in which members feel they are actively making a contribution. Kim says both she and her husband, Craig, who has been a member himself for 30 years, get a lot out of being members. "It's an amazing social atmosphere. You can walk into the curling club and feel like it's your second home."

Today, members are each required to do a certain amount of volunteer work that can mean anything from helping out in the kitchen; to assisting at the bar; running bonspiels or sitting on the board of directors or one of the club's committees. Aside from the caretaker and the icemakers, all the positions at the club are voluntary ones.

Right now, members of the club are looking forward to another season of curling that should be attractive to a variety of curlers whether they are experienced or inexperienced. The club, which has a membership of 400, has

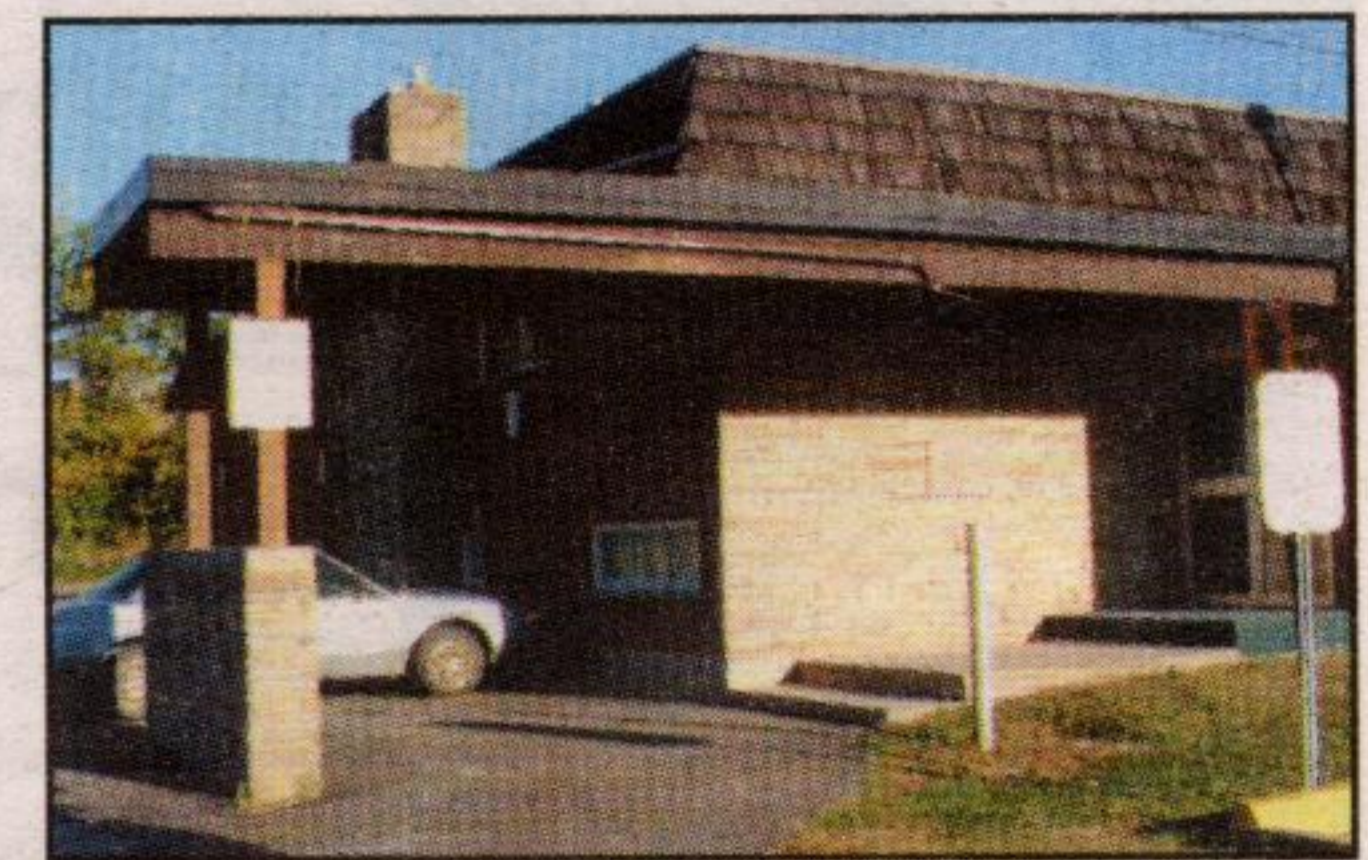


Kim Thomas, who is a member of the Milton Curling Club, sits on the committee which organized the club's 40th anniversary celebration.

curling offered in the day with day ladies, day mixed and seniors curling as well as evening curling that includes both social, mixed and competitive mixed and men's. There is business women's curling and for younger people, the club offers junior as well as novice curling.

Mel says the club is a "friendly organization" that has attracted a loyal membership, and it's also a club that has provided assistance to the community. "We have supported the Milton District Hospital and each year we sponsor a bonspiel to benefit the Canadian Cancer Society and Halton Women's Place. We have raised over \$200,000 for both groups over the last five years."

Anyone who is interested in the 40th anniversary celebrations can contact Louise Kemp at 905-878-0197 or Roger Tiffin at rtiffin@cogeco.ca.



The Milton Curling Club wasn't officially established until the clubhouse was built in 1964.



Some members of the Milton Curling Club, front row, from left to right: Pat Noble, Nancy McKenzie, Audrea Lear-Costigan, Jean McDuffe, and Norma Kitchen. In the back row, from left to right: Charles Thomson, Mel Phelps, Norm Coulter, and Diane Vandenbossche, president of the Milton Curling Club.

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