



Champion COMMUNITY Page

Local stroke victims start support group

By CARRIE BRUNET
The Champion

There is life after a stroke. Just ask survivor Judi Hanson.

Ms Hanson, who's starting up a support group for stroke patients discharged from hospital, was in a coma for a week following her stroke.

"I was at the prime of my life," said the mother of two adult children. "And one morning, it was all gone."

What started out as migraine pain turned out to be a brain hemorrhage for Ms Hanson on a rainy November day in 1998.

Ms Hanson's family took her to the Milton site of Halton Healthcare Services, then she was transferred to the Oakville site.

"I wasn't supposed to make it, but I did," she said.

Doctors didn't expect her to pull through. Even her family had made the decision to donate her organs. However, they weren't ready to give in just yet. They insisted on keeping Ms Hanson hooked up to the artificial ventilator for a while longer.

"They made the right decision," Ms Hanson said two years later.

When Ms Hanson was discharged from the hospital, she was in a wheelchair. Today, she gets around with only the assistance of a cane.

In fact because she can no longer drive, she walks to all her destinations, including her volunteer work.

Nonetheless, surviving the stroke was only the beginning of an upward battle.

Ms Hanson and her husband gave up their home, in favour of an apartment where everything is on one floor.

She can no longer work as an office manager, a position that earned her a fair salary.

Doctors attributed her stroke largely to stress.

"I used to go through life (thinking) 'Work hard and play hard,'" she said. "I don't forge ahead so much anymore. I take my time."

Ms Hanson has had no choice but to slow things down after her stroke.

"(Having a stroke) takes away your independence and your ability to earn money," she said. "I lost everything so quickly."

Because of the drastic lifestyle change, Ms Hanson said it's easy to get depressed,

something she's noticed among fellow stroke patients.

"When you come out of the hospital, you think you're the only one," Ms Hanson said.

She felt it was important to start the 'Milton Stokers' in order to reduce isolation and provide peer support to people once they are discharged from hospital.

"There are currently no services in the Milton community that are geared to stroke (patients)," said Sian Evans, occupational therapist with Halton Healthcare Services' Milton site.

Ms Evans is assisting Ms Hanson in getting the support group together.

"Community reintegration and the support that this group has the potential to provide could prove to be invaluable," Ms. Evans said.

According to Ms. Evans, Milton Stokers will bridge a gap in post-stroke care allowing for a smooth transition from therapy to independent living.

Ms Hanson said she has had interest from about 20 fellow stroke patients already, and the group only officially kicked off yesterday.

The first meeting, which took place at the Allendale long-term-care facility, was an introductory session where members met fellow stroke patients and shared stories.

Eventually, Ms Hanson hopes to have speakers from the medical field speak at the meetings to provide information on managing post-stroke health. Furthermore, she'd like to see the group go out on excursions, such as trips to the local swimming pool.

"Apart from being a support group, it will be educational," she said.

However, she's keeping the meeting format open to changes.

"I want everyone to benefit from this," she said. "I want to gear it each individual member."

A donation from the Milton Optimist Club has made it possible for the group to start up without membership costs, and Allendale is providing a meeting space free of charge.

The group will meet for about an hour every first Monday of the month.

Additionally, Ms Hanson wants the group to raise awareness about strokes and the importance of preventing them.

"Everyone is afraid of strokes," she said. "And they should be."

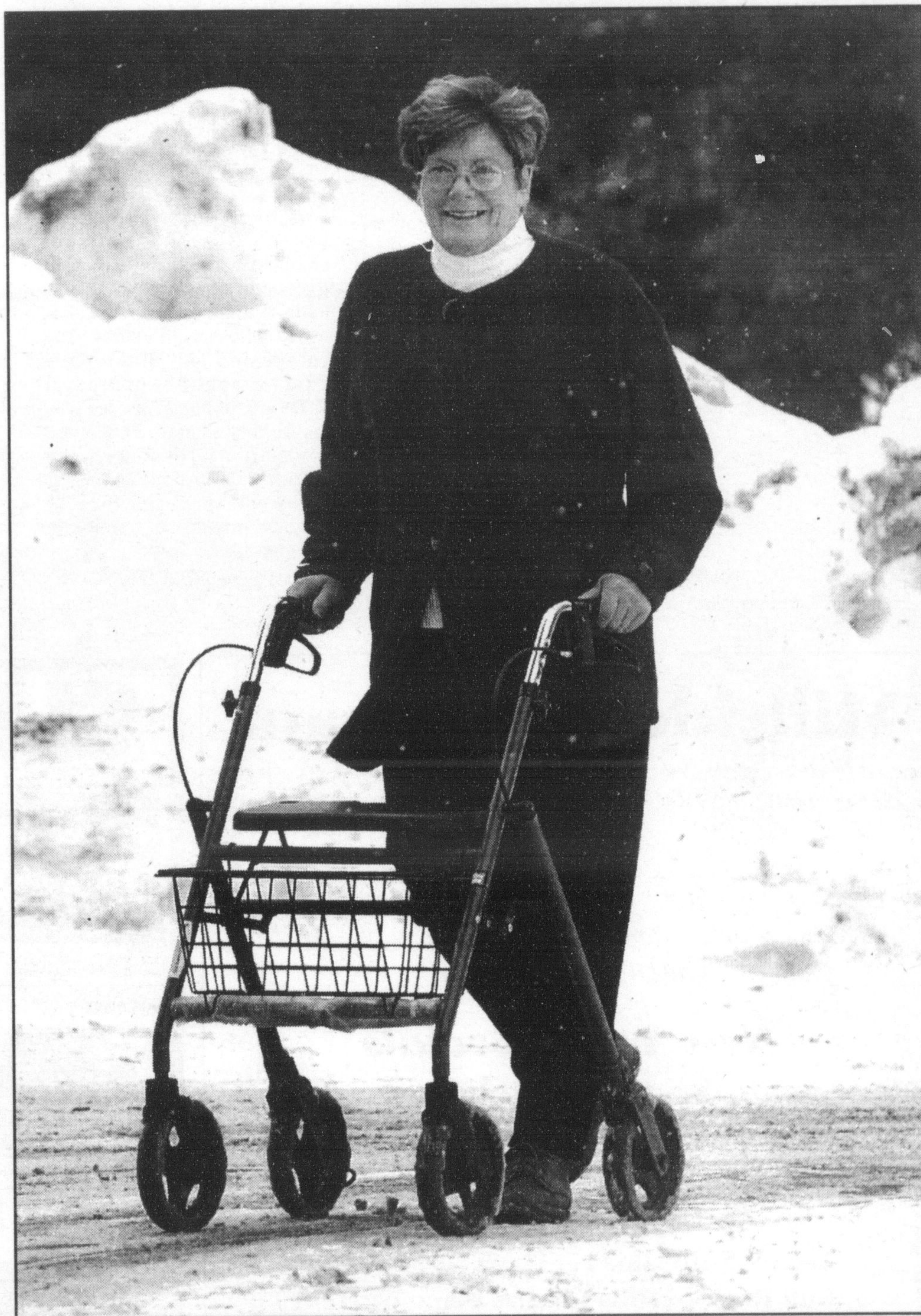


Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Stroke survivor Judi Hanson was in a wheelchair following her stroke two years ago. Encouraged by her success in her physical therapy, Ms Hanson is reaching out to other stroke patients as she starts a support group for survivors — the Milton Stokers.

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COGECO 14 Programming Schedule — January 9th, 2000 - January 15th, 2001

Tuesday, January 9th	
9am, 10am, 11am, Noon	Plugged In! Encore
5pm, 6pm & 7:30pm	Plugged In! Seniors Showcase
5:30pm	Optimist TV
6:30pm	Bingo
8:00pm	A War of Their Own, Part 1

Wednesday, January 10th	
9am, 10am, 11am, Noon	Plugged In! Encore
5pm, 6pm, 7:30pm	Plugged In! Cable in the Classroom
5:30pm	Swap Talk
6:30pm	Milton Council, Jan. 8th
8:00pm	

Thursday, January 11th	
9am, 10am, 11am, Noon	Plugged In! Encore
5pm, 6pm, 7:30pm	Plugged In!
5:30pm	The Issue is...
6:30pm	Road Watch: Alternative of Anger
7:00pm	Money Week
8:00pm	A War of Their Own, Part 2

Sunday, January 14th	
9am, 10am, 11am, Noon	Plugged In! - Encore
5pm, 6 pm & 7:30 pm	Plugged In!
5:30pm	Road Watch: Alternative of Anger
6:30pm	Seniors Showcase
7:00pm	Money Week

Monday, January 15th	
9am, 10am, 11am, Noon	Plugged In! Encore
5pm, 6pm, 7:30pm	Plugged In!
5:30pm	Living on the Edge
6:30pm	Money Week
7:00pm	The Issue is...
8:00pm	SportsZONE Live

Feature this week: Full Programming Returns This Week!