



Champion COMMUNITY Page

Volunteer Week

Volunteering in full swing at seniors' centre

By **STEPHANIE THIESSEN**

The Champion

It's a busy Wednesday at the Milton Seniors' Activity Centre. The clamour of voices and the smell of roast beef with all the trimmings leak into the hall, drawing visitors — like myself — into the dining area.

Inside, the atmosphere resembles a huge family reunion, with friends enjoying their meals at round tables and laughter bouncing off the walls.

All this happiness — the smiles, the joking, the full stomachs and loosened belts — wouldn't exist without the generosity of the centre's senior volunteers.

This week is Volunteer Week, a week designed to honour volunteers who've given so much of themselves and to educate the general public about the benefits of volunteerism.

There's no better way to do this than to take a peek at the seniors' centre. And there's perhaps no better person to talk to about the benefits of volunteering than Hilda McKinley.

As a child, Ms McKinley said she dreamed of being a teacher. Now, at the age of 80, that dream has finally come true — through her volunteering. Ms McKinley teaches the computer class at the seniors' centre.

"It's something useful that I like to do," Ms McKinley said, taking a break from her meal. "I wanted to be a teacher when I was a kid but I wasn't, so now I've finally fulfilled that dream."

Ms McKinley is one of almost 270 seniors who volunteer at the seniors' centre in various capacities, donating anything from one to 20 hours each week.

For some, it's a little something to get them out of the house each week. For others, it's the equivalent of a full-time job. For almost every one of them, it's something they wouldn't dream of giving up.

Nobody knows this better than Tammy Corless, the centre's recreation supervisor.

The centre, Ms Corless explained, has more than 50 different programs. There's something for just about everyone, from those interested in singing to dancing to crafts. All these programs are able to function with just a handful of paid staff members, she said, thanks to the help of volunteers.

The centre's volunteer structure is composed of an advisory board of directors and sub-committees such as the special events committee.

Volunteering is beneficial for the giver as well as the receiver, Ms Corless said.



Mary Lou Graham (left) and Jean Churchill knit a pair of socks in the Milton Seniors' Activity Centre's crafts room.

Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

"I believe it gives them socialization — a chance to interact with other seniors and get involved," she said.

Having positive self-esteem and being physically active are other advantages to volunteering, Ms Corless said.

Most volunteers begin as program participants and then decide to become involved on a deeper level, she said.

Now more than ever, volunteers should be cherished, Ms Corless said.

"Everybody's having a hard time getting volunteers, because people are so busy. Even with seniors, they're caring for their grandchildren or taking advantage of their time off to go travelling."

Down the hall, a dozen or so senior women sit beading, crocheting and knitting as part of the Creative Fingers Craft Club. Jean Churchill has led the program with Mary Lou Graham for the past five or six years.

Ms Churchill said she loves the companion-

ship that comes with the job, while another woman from the other side of the room quipped that it's a great way to get out of housework.

Creative Fingers is held Mondays and Wednesdays at the centre, and for Ms Churchill, these mornings take priority over almost anything else.

"I fit my work at home in between Monday and Wednesday mornings," she said, joking that even if she wanted to, she couldn't get out of her work at the centre — "I'd have to stop doing a good job."

What does she like about convening the program? "The power," she said, laughing.

Ms Graham, who has been retired for 10 years, said she began coming to the seniors' centre to get out of the house, and then began volunteering. She does it simply because "I enjoy people," she said.

Back in the lunch room, it isn't difficult to get June Pinnell to talk about her experiences volunteering. Ms Pinnell, a long-time Milton resi-

dent, has been a reception volunteer, a trips coordinator and a well-wisher responsible for mailing out cards and greetings to centre members.

"I first joined in 1988, and they asked me if I'd help put on a bizarre," she said. "It evolved from there."

The greatest satisfaction she gets is "giving back (to the community) and being among people — except Tammy," she said, in her usual back-and-forth friendly banter with Ms Corless.

Turning more serious she said, "I've made some wonderful friends since joining, who have been with me through lots of difficult times."

To seniors who have even casually considered volunteering at the centre, she said: "Get your rear end in here and do something."

For more information about volunteering with the Milton Seniors' Activity Centre, call Tammy Corless at (905) 875-1681.

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Programming Schedule — Tuesday, April 29th - Monday, May 5th, 2003

Tuesday, April 29		Wednesday, April 30		Thursday, May 1		Sunday, May 4		Monday, May 5	
5, 6 & 7:30pm	Plugged In! Early Week Edition	5, 6 & 7:30pm	Plugged In! Early Week Edition	5 & 6pm	Plugged In! Early Week Edition	5, 6 & 7:30pm	Plugged In! Late Week Edition	5:00pm	Plugged In! Late Week Edition
5:30pm	Seniors Showcase	5:30pm	Kid Connection	5:30pm	Osler Health Connection	5:30pm	Faces Milton Community Awards	5:30pm	Faces Milton Community Awards
6:30pm	Optimist TV Bingo (Live)	6:30pm	Swap Talk (Live)	6:30pm	Main Street	6:30pm	Seniors Showcase	6:00pm - 10:30pm	Georgetown Kinsmen TV Auction
8:00pm	Halton Hills Council (Apr 28)	8:00pm	Milton Council (Apr 28)	8:00pm	TBA	7:00pm	Osler Health Connection		
						8:00pm	Main Street		