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Community Page

ConnectCare offers lifeline for many

By **GILLIAN CORMIER**
 Special to The Champion

Sometimes a little button can make a big difference. For ConnectCARE clients, it can mean the difference between independence and assisted living.

The ConnectCARE program is a non-profit personal response service operated by Halton hospitals that allows seniors and persons with chronic medical or physical conditions to reach help at the touch of a button.

"Clients wear a little button, waterproof and very light, on their wrist or as a pendant that's connected to a speaker unit that dials into the Oakville response centre," said ConnectCARE Co-ordinator Margaret Robichaud.

When the button is pressed, she explained, the speaker unit is activated and staff at the centre contact the client through the unit. A family member, a neighbour or emergency service is then dispatched depending on the nature of the problem.

If the client doesn't respond, the alert is treated as an emergency. All relevant personal and medical information is immediately available to staff, who then dispatch emergency services.

"The program is designed to get people help quickly, so they don't go undiscovered if they're hurt," said Ms Robichaud.

It also complements other home-care services, and allows clients to prolong or delay institutionalized care in a lot of cases.

ConnectCARE is monitored 24 hours a day to meet the needs of older clients and those suffering from seizures, MS or other medical conditions that sometimes make living independently a challenge.

The program operates on user fees, which include a one-time \$35 cost for initial activation and \$35 a month for maintenance. ConnectCARE also offers funding for those who can't afford the service, and works with local community groups to sponsor qualified candidates.

The Royal Canadian Legion in Milton currently sponsors two individuals.

Units are installed by volunteers, many of whom are retired. They also make sure the units are functioning properly and that the batteries get changed regularly. When a unit gets low on batteries, it sends a signal to the response centre, which dispatches a volunteer to replace them. The speaker unit also has a battery back-up, which allows the unit to function in a blackout.

About 950 clients in Halton and other

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MARGARET ROBICHAUD

areas of Ontario use the service, and Ms Robichaud said the centre is now able to monitor clients anywhere in North America. She said some clients take their units with them to cottages up north or on vacations elsewhere in Canada.

In those cases, the centre gets information on the new location and performs test calls to the new area to ensure they can respond quickly in an emergency.

ConnectCARE celebrated its 15th anniversary in October, and since its inception has provided life-saving support to thousands in the Halton area alone. But ConnectCARE also provides clients with something equally important — a sense of security, self-esteem and the ability to be less restricted by physical limitations.

"It's not an admission of frailty, it's a powerful thing," she said. "It gives them the choice to remain independent. People don't like to think about it until something happens."

She remembered one case where a woman in her eighties fell and broke her hip five feet away from the telephone. It took her an hour to get to the phone to call an ambulance, and in the process she had a heart attack. Now she has piece of mind as a ConnectCARE client.

"Falls are prevalent in older adults," she said. "If they're not discovered for 24 hours, the chance of complications developing is much higher."

Ms Robichaud described a client who had a unit installed, and the next day had chest pains and used her unit to contact the response centre to get medical attention. While in hospital, she wrote on a menu under the ConnectCARE description, 'You saved my life.'

"I kept that," said Ms Robichaud. "It struck a chord with me. It was one of those twists of fate that she had the unit installed the day before."

ConnectCARE is always looking for volunteers and donations that can be used to buy new equipment or put toward sponsoring a client in need. For more information on the program, call (905) 338-4357.



Margaret Robichaud displays one of the ConnectCare units.

Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

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Cogeco Cable Channel 14

Programming Schedule – Tuesday, August 9- Monday, August 15, 2005

Tuesday, August 9	Wednesday, August 10	Thursday, August 11	Friday, August 12	Saturday, August 13	Sunday, August 14	Monday, August 15
Midnight – 5:00am Plugged In! EXTRA	Midnight – 5:00am Plugged In! EXTRA	Midnight – 5:00am Plugged In! EXTRA	Midnight – 5:00am Plugged In! EXTRA	Midnight – 5:00am Plugged In! EXTRA	Midnight – 5:00am Plugged In! EXTRA	Midnight – 5:00am Plugged In! EXTRA
5:00am – 8:00am TVCogeco Billboard & Weather Radio	5:00am – 8:00am TVCogeco Billboard & Weather Radio	5:00am – 8:00am TVCogeco Billboard & Weather Radio	5:00am – 8:00am TVCogeco Billboard & Weather Radio	5:00am – 8:00am TVCogeco Billboard & Weather Radio	5:00am – 8:00am TVCogeco Billboard & Weather Radio	5:00am – 8:00am TVCogeco Billboard & Weather Radio
8:00am – 5:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	8:00am – 1:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	8:00am – 1:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	8:00am – 1:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	8:00am – 4:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	8:00am – 10:30pm Plugged In! EXTRA	8:00am – 5:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA
5:00pm – 8:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	1:00pm – 4:00pm Halton Hills Council	1:00pm – 4:00pm Milton Council	1:00pm – 4:00pm Halton Region Council Aug 10 2005	4:00pm TVCogeco Sports: TBA	10:30am TVCogeco Sports: TBA	5:00pm – 8:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA
8:00pm Halton Hills Council Aug 8 2005	4:00pm – 8:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	4:00pm – 8:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	4:00pm – 8:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	6:30pm – Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA	9:00pm – Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA	9:00pm – Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA
11:00pm – Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA	8:00pm Milton Council Aug 8 2005	8:00pm Halton Region Council	6:00pm – Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA		1:00pm – 5:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	5:00pm – 8:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA
	11:00pm – Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA	11:00pm – Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA			8:00pm – Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA	