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Rotary still rewarding: founding member

Amid milestone, Ledwith looks back fondly on club history

By Stephanie Thiessen
 CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

The Rotary Club of Milton that Mike Ledwith remembers from 60 years back is quite different from the one that raises money for local causes today.

Perhaps the biggest difference is that when it started in 1946, it was for men only and they had to be business owners.

As owner of the Quality Greens food store at Main and Martin streets, Ledwith was qualified for membership and said he liked the thought of the "prestige" associated with being part of such a well-known service club.

Decades later, as the Milton Rotary Club celebrates its 60th anniversary, Ledwith is still a dedicated member. In fact, he's the only remaining member from the original group that formed the club.

"I'm still surprised I made it," he said jovially, explaining it's the fellowship and worthy causes that have kept him hooked.

He can easily recall the first event of the club, which was held in 1946 at the old Town Hall, now the Milton Chamber of Commerce. It was a Halloween party for kids, complete with bags of candy.

Since then, the group has completed project after project, event after event.

One of the club's biggest projects that pops to mind — and perhaps the one with which most Miltonians are familiar — is Rotary Park on Mill Street.

The land for the park was purchased in 1960 by the Rotary Club, having been used by a farmer to grow hay and grains.

"We thought it would make a good area (for a park)," Ledwith said.

The pool was added around 1965, with the help of community groups including the local Lions Club.

To this day, residents continue to enjoy Rotary Park, which is extremely rewarding, Ledwith said. "Any day in summer you see kids on the swings and baseball games... It's a wonderful feeling," he said.

There's also the geared-to-income housing on Bronte Street that the Rotary Club initiated.

Two of its most well-known events are the



MARKING A MILESTONE: Founding member Mike Ledwith (left) and longtime member Ries Boers display the Rotary Club of Milton banner as the local club celebrates its 60th anniversary.

Good Neighbours Day — a community-wide clean-up — and its annual TV auction.

On an international scale, one of the Rotary Club's biggest accomplishments has been working to eradicate polio.

There are currently about 25 members — women and men — of the Rotary Club of Milton. They meet each Monday night upstairs at The Olde Dickens restaurant with a different guest speaker. Guests are welcome.

The Rotary Club was the world's first service club, founded in Chicago, Illinois in 1905. The term 'rotary' came from the practice of rotating meetings amongst members' offices. It's now the world's largest service club, with 1.2 million members.

The object of the Rotary Club, as defined on the website of the Rotary Club of Milton, is to "foster the ideal of service" in personal, business and community life. It also aims to promote international understanding, goodwill and peace.

Its motto is "Service above self."

Programs include ecology and conservation projects, community service, youth travel exchanges and more.

Ries Boers has been a Rotarian for 25 years and has served as club president for three terms. "It's become a lifestyle," he said, explaining it's rewarding participating in worthwhile causes and meeting so many new friends.

Although he leads a busy life, Boers said he couldn't imagine not being a member.

"People who give back to the community definitely benefit," he explained.

He joined the organization after receiving support for his handicapped daughter. After a while, he realized it was important that he pay the group back for its help.

Fundraising is a big part of Rotarians' lives. "The neatest part is watching the money actually go to work," Boers said.

The group's next fundraising event is a murder mystery dinner that'll take place March 31 at the Grand Chalet restaurant on Steeles Avenue.

Cocktails will be at 6:30 p.m., with dinner at 7 p.m. and dancing until 1 a.m. There'll also be a silent auction and raffles.

Tickets cost \$50, with proceeds going toward a CT scanner for Milton District Hospital.

With the theme being Heroes, Villains and Murder, attendees are invited to dress as their favourite superhero or bad guy.

For tickets, call (905) 878-4094.

The club is always looking for new members. Boers said residents who aren't sure they can make the full commitment right away can become members of Friends of Rotary.

Ledwith likewise encouraged people to at least check out the organization.

"I would really advise anyone looking for a club to give Rotary a good look. They're a good bunch of people."

For more information, visit www.milton-rotaryclub.com.

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Programming Schedule — Tuesday, March 20 - Monday, March 26, 2007

Tuesday, March 20	Wednesday, March 21	Thursday, March 22	Friday, March 23	Saturday, March 24	Sunday, March 25	Monday, March 26
8:00am - 1:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	8:00am - 1:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	8:00am - 12:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	8:00am - 1:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	8:00am - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA	8:00am - 6:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	8:00am - 1:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA
1:00pm SportsZONE Live	1:00pm Halton Hills Council (cc)	12:00pm Swap Talk (Replay)	1:00pm The 2007 Georgetown Hockey Heritage Awards - Bob Hooper	6:00pm Halton Hills Council (cc)	6:00pm Halton Hills Council (cc)	1:00pm Halton Hills Council (cc)
2:00pm - 6:30pm Plugged In! EXTRA	3:00pm - 7:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	1:00pm - 8:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	3:00pm - 7:30pm Plugged In! EXTRA	8:00pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA	8:00pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA	3:00pm - 8:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA
6:30pm Optimist TV Bingo (Live)	7:00pm Simply Halton	8:00pm Living Healthy	7:30pm TVCogeco Sports: AHL Hockey Live - Albany vs Hamilton			8:00pm SportsZONE Live
7:30pm Plugged In!	7:30pm Plugged In! EXTRA	9:00pm The 2007 Georgetown Hockey Heritage Awards - Bob Hooper	10:30pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA			9:00pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA
8:00pm Auto Experts (Live)	8:00pm Swap Talk	11:00am - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA				
9:00pm Halton Hills Council (cc)	9:00pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA					
11:00pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA						