

Seniors have power to take charge in the marketplace

Many senior citizens are masters at comparison shopping, but haven't yet discovered their real power in the marketplace.

The Ontario Consumer Ministry often hears from seniors who are frustrated by the lack of home delivery, small portion packages of groceries and similar products or services that would meet their needs. They shop carefully for the best deals, but can't find really suitable choices.

Government can't force businesses to provide for special requirements, but seniors themselves can, says the ministry's chief consumer advisor Marilyn Gurevsky.

"We're talking about a huge segment of the population and that's the key," Ms Gurevsky says. "Any large group of consumers with similar needs has enormous pull in the marketplace, but they have to speak up."

To be heard by retailers, customers have to organize themselves, regardless of where they live or what they are after, says Joyce King, head of the United Senior Citizens of Ontario.

In small communities, it should be a simple matter to gather signatures on petitions or form united groups to ask shopkeepers for special considerations, Ms King says. Even in large cities, seniors can band together within their neighborhoods.

"A loud collective voice is much more effective than one person asking," says the leader of Ontario seniors. "Retailers don't want to lose business and if there are a lot of names on a list or a lot of people asking, the requests will be met."

Neither Ms Gurevsky nor Ms King is suggesting armies of irate seniors roam Ontario confronting shop owners. But with a bit of organization, seniors can make positive suggestions that benefit themselves and the stores. The free market works on supply and demand. If store owners aren't aware of the demand, they won't come through with the supply and everyone suffers for it, Gurevsky says.

One of the most common requests for small portions of meats and other

groceries is now being met more frequently. The packages may carry slightly higher unit prices, but they're cheaper in the end if larger portions were resulting in waste.

According to Ms King, an even bigger concern arises over the size of portions in restaurants. When dealing with a package of pork chops at home, seniors may have the options of freezing excess portions or sharing with friends. But there are few alternatives when faced with an oversized restaurant meal. Waste is the usual outcome.

"Restaurants should offer seniors' portions, just as they offer children's meals," Ms King says.

The Ontario seniors population -- nearly one million strong -- has made major strides in recent years. The market is awakening to the vast potential of the group. Not only are advertisers aiming campaigns directly at seniors, employers looking for particular attributes are pulling retirees back into the workforce. In particular, one fast food giant is hiring seniors for jobs formerly filled exclusively by teens.

The seniors' discount card or special savings day at retail stores has proliferated at an astounding rate, much to the delight of the target audience. Not only are seniors usually on fixed incomes, but they are naturally among the most diligent bargain hunters in the marketplace, Ms King says.

"The seniors of today lived through the depression and they learned to squeeze every nickel," Ms King says. "They are really good at comparison shopping."

If seniors have a vulnerable spot as consumers, it probably lies in their inherent desire to trust people. Brought up in a different era when a handshake had value, seniors are among the most common victims of fraud, Ms Gurevsky notes.

"It's a sad comment on our world, but some seniors have to learn to be more cynical and skeptical when offered the deal of a lifetime," she says.

Consumers who feel they have been unfairly treated can contact a local Consumer Services Bureau of the ministry.



Glaciers left their mark on the land at the south shores of Lake Erie. This amazing sight was shared by several Milton seniors who toured the Lake Erie islands in July.

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Colour tours included in fall travel agenda

All Aboard

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Back in May, twenty-eight Milton Seniors boarded a coach headed for the Tulip Festival in Holland, Michigan for four days.

Our first stop was at the Holiday Inn in Grand Rapids, Michigan where we were to stay our first night. After a warm reception we prepared ourselves for a dinner theatre evening where we saw *The All Night Strut*.

In the morning a tour guide dressed in Dutch costume took us on a tour of Holland, Michigan. What a spectacular looking city with all of the streets and boulevards planted with multi-coloured tulips.

The highlight of the Holland Tulip Festival was the parade which involved all of the residents. The traditional street scrubbing before the parade started, involved thousands of people.

Our afternoon was made complete by visiting the Tulip Farm, Delft China Factory and the Dutch Shoe Factory. In the evening we were entertained by the young people at Wesley Church who performed a musical presentation called *The Power and The Glory*.

Our third day included: a trip to the Civic Centre in Holland to see and hear the stars of Lawrence Welk; some traditionally Dutch sights of the area; and the marvelous Tulip Farm.

We visited Frankenmuth, Michigan on our fourth day where we enjoyed Zwender's famous chicken dinner and browsed through several boutiques and specialty shops.

In June, 47 Milton seniors boarded a bus headed for Port Stanley. The first stop at the Aylmer Flea Market was quite enjoyable, especially considering the bargains available. We could buy cauliflower, broccoli or spanish onions all three for \$1. We could set up our own flea market by the time we had made all of our purchases.

When we arrived in Port Stanley we boarded a small train that took us through a scenic portion of Southwestern Ontario between Port Stanley and the Village of Union.

Another full bus attended the Port Dover Fish Fry on June 27th. This event was organized for several seniors centres in the area and therefore attracted a large

number of people. There was comedy entertainment by "The Yorkshire Lad" and a twelve piece orchestra of "The Old Pros". Although the huge crowds made it difficult to participate in the entertainment, the fish dinner was superb.

From July 12-14 some Milton seniors enjoyed a trip to the Lake Erie Islands. This trip was specially designed for those who enjoy being on the water. The cruise of the islands was scenic with its many interesting attractions.

It included some fascinating sights where the glaciers had moved through the area long ago and made tremendous markings in the rock. The entire area of the Lake Erie Islands seems to be the best kept secret on the south shore of Lake Erie. A trip well worth enjoying.

We travelled to Harbourfront for a day in August. Unfortunately the weather didn't co-operate fully but that didn't dampen our spirits.

Some people walked up to the Antique Market and others had a game of Bingo. Luckily the weather held up a bit in the afternoon so we could go on a boat tour of the Toronto Harbour and Toronto Island. We never realized how much there is to see at Harbourfront.

A full bus of 47 seniors left from Milton to go to the Blythe Festival on August 31st. The group made a few stops along the way before they reached Blythe for a fun-loving comedy performance *The Mail Order Bride*.

The fall offers more exciting trips including day trips to Kitchener Farmers Market; Beaver Valley & Collingwood Colour Tour; Tender Tootsies; Hamilton Parade of Stars; Simcoe Lights; and Outlet Shopping. Our overnight excursions will take us to Pennsylvania to enjoy "The Great Train Experience" and to Akron, Ohio to stay in a refurbished silo.

For more information on upcoming trips call the Senior Citizens' Recreation Centre at 875-1681.

Planning to serve seniors in 2001

The year-long process of developing a strategic plan for the delivery of health and social services for seniors in Halton Region to the year 2001 began in June at a meeting of the new Elderly Services Strategic Planning Committee.

This group, comprising professionals and seniors will consider that within the Region of Halton, there is a mix of small towns, rural areas and high density, fast growing urban areas. To ensure a comprehensive, realistic plan will be developed, community consultation will be a major focus. Input will be sought from senior groups, families, service providers, politicians and individuals interested in commenting on the future needs of seniors.

The first phase entails developing an understanding of the present range of services, gaps in service and issues that affect the delivery of services over the coming years. This will include a review of demographics, government policies and existing documentation.

Interviews, questionnaires to service providers and to seniors and a random

telephone survey will be conducted by the committee.

The information collected in Phase I will be analyzed and an interim report will be prepared by January 1990. At that time further public input will be sought when the report is presented at community meetings. This will produce another report (Phase 2) in May.

In the final phase, the work of the committee will be to develop a strategic plan for services. The plan will outline priorities, responsibilities and time lines for implementation. A final report will be developed in June 1990 and will encompass the activities of all phases including the extensive input received from the community.

The report will be forwarded to the Halton Regional Council and District Health Council and then onto the Ministry of Community and Social Services and the Ministry of Health.

If you have any comments on services to seniors in Halton Region, please contact Ellis Katsos, 827-2151 or Marlene London, 842-2120.

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