

# Resource centres aim to break down barriers to seniors

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By JANE MULLER

The image of cranky old people who are a burden on their families is gradually melting away with some added heat from educational material now available at Halton libraries.

A total of 75 videos, 35 publications and five training courses are part of the provincial Office for Senior Citizens' Affairs community resource centres. Oakville Public Library's main branch, where the resource units were unveiled last Thursday, will house the video collection. These tapes can be borrowed through the Milton Public Library and Halton Hills Public Library computer systems.

The new addition to the libraries is actually a three-panel display containing information aimed at breaking down barriers to seniors and fostering a more positive image of older adults. Mary Brown, manager of the resource unit for the Office for Senior Citizens' Affairs, outlined the contents to the annual meeting of Halton Region's Elderly Services Advisory Committee (ESAC).

Ms Brown explained that the resource material could benefit the general public, business owners and professionals. Seniors stand to gain through an increased understanding of their needs. The wellbeing of this age group should be of "personal concern," Ms Brown stressed, noting that we'll all be seniors one day.

Among the videos presented at the meeting was *Grandpa's Computer*. A 60-second television advertisement that reached 80 per cent of Canadians during its six-week run, it tackles the issue of stereotyping.

In the video, grandma and grandpa quickly transform themselves and their home from modern to 'old' after their children call to say they're coming for a visit. The parents presented to their children what was expected of them. Ms Brown suggested the clip is ideal for stimulating discussion in a classroom setting or a meeting.

Another video, *Prime Times*, is aimed at business owners and at-

tempts to demonstrate how to cater to older consumers.

"It can be an incredible act of courage to leave the home and go into the marketplace," Ms Brown said of seniors.

A bad experience she said can "damage self-image and cause withdrawal". There can be physical barriers that discourage seniors from going out or encounters with seemingly insensitive store personnel and professionals.

Other videos cover volunteer recruitment, the treatment of seniors in hospitals and the province-wide Good Neighbours program that was filmed in Halton. The program promotes lending a hand and looking out for one's neighbour.

Among the resource unit's written material are aids for educators, with a focus on changing the attitudes of youth toward the elderly. Another group the information targets is organized religion. According to Ms Brown, 50 per cent of congregations are older than 65 and the development of special outreach programs is being encouraged.

Halton was applauded as an "exemplary community" by Phillip Adams, special advisor with the Office for Senior Citizens' Affairs, Ministry of Citizenship.

Mr. Adams attended the annual meeting to unveil the resource unit and to recognize his ministry's partnership with Halton in its development.

ESAC members had initially pushed to have the resource materials from the Office for Senior Citizens' Affairs made available in Halton.

When that happened, they were "overwhelmed by the quantity and quality of the resources," said ESAC vice-chairperson Rebecca Wylie during her presentation of the ESAC annual report.

Mr. Adams said the Halton resource unit is viewed by the ministry as a demonstration program that could expand across the province. The units are funded by the Ministry of Citizenship.



Photo by RIZIERO VERTOLLI

The first Office for Senior Citizens' Affairs Resource Centre outside of Toronto was unveiled at the annual meeting of Halton's Elderly Services Advisory Committee (ESAC) on Thursday. Halton now has resource units at Oakville, Milton and Halton Hills libraries. Milton's chief librarian Jane Watkins checks out one of the videos available through the resource centre, with Mayor Gord Krantz (right). At left is Philip Adams, special advisor with the Office for Senior Citizens' Affairs and Dr. Greg Thomson, chairperson of ESAC.

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