

History group prepares to open research centre

BY DANIEL SCHWAB

When Essex resident Linda Iler tried to organize a reunion for former students of the S.S.#5 Maidstone School five years ago, she hit a snag.

She had trouble locating decades-old student enrollment lists and information on the two-classroom school.

"Nobody knew what happened to them," she said. "Even at the school board, nobody knew where the documents were. We didn't find anything."

The failed search prompted Iler to launch an initiative to preserve local historical records before they are all lost or destroyed.

In the spring, she assembled a small like-minded group of history buffs and formed the Essex and Community Historical Research Society.

Its purpose, Iler explained, is to preserve local and family history, encourage research among residents, and work with municipalities and other heritage groups to prevent the destruction or loss of historical documents and information.

"As far as history goes, there is not as much available here as other areas," Iler said. "The town and

people have got a lot stored someplace. My big hope is that they make it available to the public."

The group will be holding its first public meeting January 18 at the Essex Community Centre, where it will start gathering members and volunteers. Annual membership will cost \$25.

Once it establishes a body of members, the group will be eligible to apply for provincial heritage development grants and purchase equipment such as microfilm readers and photocopiers to better serve researchers, Iler said.

They are also working on securing space for the research centre at the Essex Community Centre located in the former Holy Name elementary school building.

When it comes to preserving history, it's strength in numbers, Iler said, and the more people who contribute, especially seniors, the better.

"Seniors have a wealth of knowledge about the history of the town," Iler said. "To put names to faces in photos and to identify old buildings. You have to work together to educate the younger generation."

So far the group has been busy collecting birth, death and marriage records, office furniture and used



Linda Iler, one of the founding members of the Essex and Community Historical Research Society, stands outside the Essex Community Centre on Gosfield Townline W. The new historical research group will hold its first public meeting Jan. 18 to gather support, build a membership base and sign up volunteers who wish to assist with the local history project.

equipment. They have also been in contact with the Ontario Historical Society and local historical groups that do not have permanent homes for their collections of heritage materials. It is hoped that the research centre operated by ECHRS will become a central depository for records related to the settlement of

the area and family history projects.

Iler said once the centre is established, people would be able to come in and use the facility to research the history of the town or create a personalized family tree.

Iler has traced her own roots back four generations to her great-grandfather

Jacob, who came to Colchester South in 1806. She has also been told that somewhere there are documents about Jacob's father Valentine looking to purchase local land in the 1780s.

"I hated history in school," Iler admitted. "But when it comes to my own area, all of this intrigues

me. I really think the demand is there. I want to gather as much of it together as I can so it's available for the next generation."

Local history buffs and genealogists are invited to attend the first public ECHRS meeting at 7 p.m. Jan. 18 at the Essex Community Centre.

Housing for homeless project stalled

BY DANIEL SCHWAB

A near-million dollar transitional housing project planned for construction in Kingsville has been delayed after the developer discovered contaminants in the soil on the property.

The project, the first of its kind in Essex County to address housing for the homeless, was originally set to have eight units, four affordable housing units and four transitional homes built at the corner of Maple and Lansdowne streets.

It is an initiative of the

Youth and Family Resource Network (YFRN), which received \$291,000 in funding from the federal government and \$63,000 from the Town of Kingsville.

Workers discovered suspicious materials in the soil at the west end of the property when digging began at the site in August, said Town of Kingsville Engineer Glen Adams.

The town has brought in Golder Associates Ltd. to perform a soil study.

The property is the site of a former tobacco processing plant that burned

down 50 to 80 years ago, Adams said, adding that the materials are most likely remnants from the operation.

Before the Town of Kingsville sold the property to the YFRN, an original study was done by Golder Associates in August 2005 and heavy metals including lead and zinc were found in soil at the east end of the site.

Petroleum hydrocarbons, residues from oils and gas, were also found, Adams said.

The materials were

removed from the site before it was sold and, at that time, no contaminants were found in the west end, he said.

While Adams says the contaminants are not "major," he added that "when you start talking about finding materials, it's scary to anybody."

"That's a problem when you're digging up old areas, you never know what you're going to find," he said.

After the August 2005 report from Golder Associates was complete,

the YFRN received an environmental clearance for four building permits.

President of the YFRN board and Kingsville Deputy Mayor Katherine Gunning said she was not aware that contaminants were identified in the east end of the property.

Gunning also said the project must be started within the first part of 2007 or it may be at risk of losing the federal funding.

She said the YFRN is currently looking to the town to identify other potential sites where the

housing project can be built.

The YFRN will not consider building only half of the project on the east end of the property because of agreements with the building contractor, she added.

"At the present time it's a hold on that site," Gunning said. "We might possibly reconsider if another clearance is given. We're still optimistic about this project."

The units would each be two storeys tall and 1,100 square feet.

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