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Joy Thornton relaxes while on the telephone. The Stouffville resident was recently named Multiple Sclerosis Person of the Year for the MS Society of Canada's York East Chapter. --Jim Thomas

Joy honored for fight against disease

By KATE GILDERDALE

When Joy Thornton greets you at the door of her bungalow just north of Stouffville, it's hard to believe she has suffered from multiple sclerosis (MS) since 1972.

Joy, who was recently elected MS person of the year by the York East Chapter of the MS Society, has no intention of giving into her condition, despite the setbacks she has encountered in her fight against the disease.

Her first exposure to MS came in 1965, when her twin sister June was diagnosed at age 25. Although June's illness attacked her swiftly, she is now doing very well and the sisters have found each other a great source of support.

"In 1972, the first signs of my illness appeared," says Joy, "extreme weakness, loss of balance and numbness." In 1978, her legs and right arm were affected. "I could not manage to hold anything in my hand, or use my right arm at all," she says. The symptoms continued through 1980, after which things began to improve.

Joy and her husband, Derek, moved to a new home in Stouffville from Markham in 1981 because of her difficulty in negotiating stairs, and in that year the York East Chapter was formed. The couple have found the support and friendship of the society invaluable.

Derek points out that the society can help provide many different types of assistance, "from putting an air conditioner in your home to supplying a central vacuum system. Government funding is available for many needs."

Membership is a family affair, with monthly meetings held at Christ Church Anglican in Stouffville or St. Patrick's Church in Markham. "We are teamed with Markham and Unionville," explains Derek.

Meetings regularly attract about 12 members and sometimes as many as 18. In addition to the meetings, the MS Society also holds special events during the year, including a car rally to be held June 18 at Markham Fairgrounds, starting at 10 a.m.

Prizes will be offered in five categories and a dance will be held at 8:30 p.m. In August, the local chapter will host a golf tournament at the Maples of Balantrae.

One of the most important dates on the MS calendar is the annual Carnation Day fund raising campaign, which is on May 6 and 7 this year. Genuine and artificial carnations will be available around town and in shopping malls.

Joy emphasizes the importance of donations. MS is the most common central nervous system disease of young adult Canadians — affecting more than 35,000 across the country — which makes finding a cure an urgent task. Research is aimed at finding the cause, as well as at relieving the symptoms and halting the progress of the disease.

To be closer to home and Joy after the onset of the disease, Derek left his office job for a career in real estate. "The pressure of business was overwhelming, and was forcing me to spend more and more time away from Joy," he says.

His career change has proved to be an excellent move, giving him more flexibility and a job he thoroughly enjoys.

Where many people would become discouraged and depressed, Joy feels she is fortunate, surrounded by a loving family and friends.

Looking radiant and determined she urges, "Please help us in our fight against MS; make a donation and wear your carnation on May 6 and 7."

Deer Park hosts benefit

STOUFFVILLE — "The Gingerbread Lady" is coming to the Deer Park Theatre May 6.

This Neil Simon play is a genuinely touching story about a popular singer's return to sobriety.

Tomorrow, (April 28), Deer Park will host a special benefit performance, (show only), of "The Owl and the Pussycat". Proceeds will go to York County Hospital, Newmarket. The time is 8 p.m. Admission is \$12 per person.

Reservations for "The Gingerbread Lady" are available by calling Deer Park Inn at 640-6060.

Reservations for Thursday's benefit performance can be arranged by calling York County Hospital Foundation Office, 853-2210.

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