

School's 'real thing' for adult students

By KATE GILDERDALE

For many adults, going back to school conjures up visions of night school courses; a chance to have fun and learn new skills in a relaxed environment.

For April Evans, it was the real thing, complete with schedules, timetables and exams. After more than 20 years away, it was no easy task to return to the classroom and hit the books. A part-time student at Stouffville District Secondary School, she is taking a Grade 10 math course.

Math hadn't been her favorite subject at high school, but like many people she discovered how useful it could be once she left. "Not having it precludes you from many kinds of jobs," she admits ruefully. The transition to the discipline of long hours of study hasn't been easy. Says April, "I'm taking it from day to day at the moment. I'm not looking at a long term goal."

She couldn't have done it without the helpful and supportive attitude at SDSS from teachers, students and the school office. "I went to guidance (staff) and spoke to them," she recalls. "They really understood the difficulties facing adult students and they have been most encouraging."

Her classmates, too, have been extremely supportive. "If I'm stuck or have a question about math, they're always willing to help," she acknowledges.

Extra coaching after class has also been useful. "The teachers offer good, practical suggestions on how to keep up," maintains April.

With the help of a tutor, who suggested extra books she could study "to help focus my mind," she is gradually starting to feel more confident in herself.

Teacher Doug McCammon worked with her to select a schedule which would be practical for her needs. "All I had to do was work hard," she laughs.

Eventually, says April, she'd like to take courses in computers and physics, but "that's long term," she says firmly.

Night school has more than 400 students this fall

By KATE GILDERDALE

Remember all that stuff your parents told you about school days being the happiest of your life? If you're one of the more than 400 people enrolled in an SDSS night course, perhaps you're beginning to see their point.

Night school principal Dorian Baxter is delighted with the response in Stouffville and his enthusiasm for his job is infectious. "We have a total of 27 courses and there has to be a minimum of 15 in each," he explains. "One of our courses has attracted about 40 students."

The most popular course this year is a volleyball and physical fitness program, with demand so high that some applicants have had to go on a waiting list. Aerobics has attracted large numbers, with yoga and tai chi also doing well.

For those with an artistic bent, courses in watercolors and oil painting are offered, as well as a course on stained glass.

Dance lovers are well catered to, with rock and roll attracting both the young and those in their mid to late 30s. SDSS also offers

jazz and social dance (traditional ballroom dancing) and they are all well attended, says Baxter.

The Discovery course for children in Grades 4 to 6 has given Mr. Baxter particular pleasure. "Because only four children enrolled originally, we were going to drop it," he notes.

A disappointed mother contacted him and, with some local publicity and the help of the schools, "we now have a class on Wednesday nights between 6:30 and 8:30," he declares.

With a solid enrollment of 16, the course offers "an educational experience beyond that which is normally available in regular school," with a creative and exploratory approach to different subjects, including cooking and woodworking.

Despite the variety of courses already offered, Mr. Baxter is keen to enlarge the scope of his programs. He would welcome suggestions and hopes people interested in teaching courses will approach him.

He already has had offers from individuals willing to teach reupholstery and sewing classes in the new year.

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