

Community

Close-Up

HOSPITAL SEEKS HUMAN TOUCH

JULIE CASPERSEN
Staff Reporter

Markham-Stouffville Hospital needs your talent, your time and even your human touch.

"In just three hours a week, you can make a difference," volunteer co-ordinator Magda Rigo said.



MAGDA RIGO
Volunteer recruiter

Rigo is in charge of recruiting volunteers to help out at the new 244-bed general hospital. She's looking for people to bring their talents and skills to supplement the care given by medical staff.

Men, women, seniors and teens — everyone has something to offer, from manning the telephones to playing with children, to lending a friendly ear.

So far, Rigo has heard from 350 interested volunteers. She hopes to recruit 650 by the opening of the hospital at Hwy. 7 and the Ninth Line in early 1990. Rigo

was to start interviewing these hopeful helpers Sept. 5. "I'll look at what they have to bring, look at their motivation," she said.

People volunteer for a variety of reasons. Some simply want to help, while others are willing to learn new skills or pass on what they know. Some give their time in order to get out of a routine at work or home.

Prescription for a modern hospital: the touch of volunteers

Others want to meet people while some think volunteer work looks good on a resume.

According to Joan Wood of Markham's volunteer bureau, approximately 600 town residents volunteered their services in the last 12 months.

They are among the 75,000 volunteers in Ontario. During 1988, 1,855,000 Canadians gave their time to help others.

"The interest in the hospital is tremendous," Wood said. "It's a very visible presence."

Volunteers have been lobbying for a local hospital for at least 15 years, and have been "extremely active" for the past 10 years. Wood said only in the last five years has paid staff worked for the hospital.

As well as interviewing applicants, Rigo will give volunteers initial training to be

completed on the job.

And the jobs available to volunteers are wide-ranging and require all levels of skill.

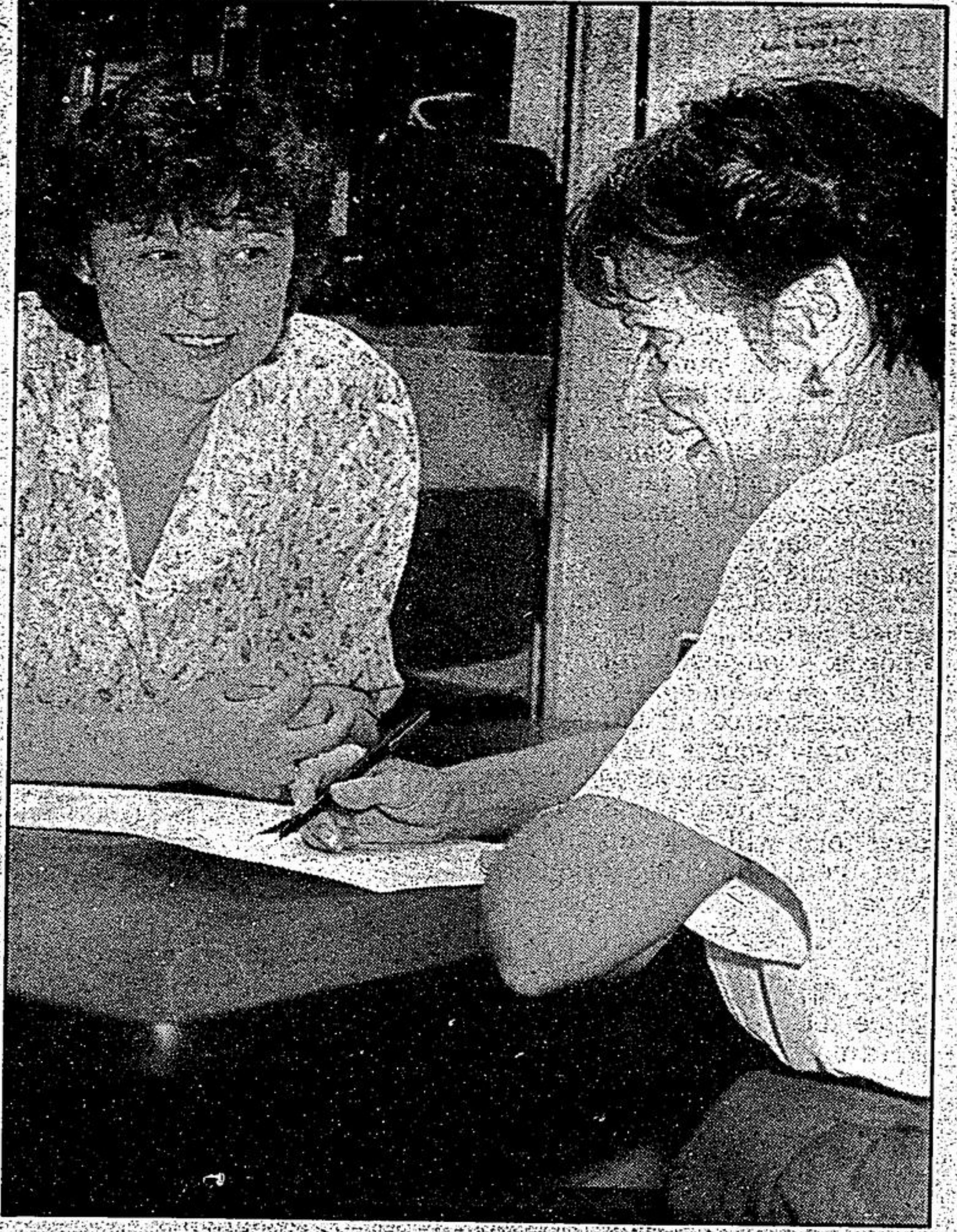
Volunteers are needed to work in a variety of departments including intensive care, pediatrics, obstetrics, psychiatry, radiology and emergency.

Some of the tasks volunteers are needed for are:

- escorting patients to appointments in the hospital;
- sorting incoming mail;
- working at the information desk;
- telephoning doctors' offices to inform them when their patient has been admitted;
- acting as tour guide to expectant parents and orienting them with the labor delivery unit;
- helping new moms with babies;
- visiting lonely patients;
- planning recreational activities;
- delivering flowers, visiting patients with a shopping cart, distributing books and magazines;

Moving patients around the hospital, a "horrendous task," is a service that should appeal to men. Rigo said volunteer departments usually have a large core of female workers and she's looking for men to round out the staff.

Teens, aged 14 to 19, are welcome to join the ranks of the



Magda Rigo speaks with a volunteer candidate for the Markham-Stouffville Hospital. She began recruiting earlier this month in the hopes of finding 650 before the hospital opens early next year. Men, women and teens are being sought for a wide range of duties.

hospital's "volunteer" service. Rigo is contacting local high school guidance counsellors and

hopes to recruit younger volunteers, especially during summer months.

"We're very eager to take on students," Rigo said.

Volunteering could also expose youths interested in pursuing a medical career to what it's really like to work in a hospital.

She is looking for 150 volunteers to act as tour guides for the opening ceremonies.

And once the hospital is running, volunteers will be involved from day one.

Rigo said integrating paid staff and volunteers will be easier because all staff is at the same entry level. "It's exciting for us to see it all unfold," she said.

Sometimes volunteers find it difficult to work with paid staff. They find it intimidating. Rigo hopes to encourage interaction between the two groups.

Instead of just thinking something should be done, "people are starting to believe they are the ones to do something," Rigo said. She anticipates a strong reaction from the local community and hopes to develop a core of committed volunteers.

But helping out for a few hours a week for six months is also helpful.

Volunteering can give you a necessary outlet for "personal satisfaction" and growth, at the same time as being a challenge.

"It has to be enjoyable... to get something out of it," Rigo said.

If you are willing to give a few hours of your time to the hospital, give Rigo a call at 294-6660.



The exterior of the Markham-Stouffville Hospital has reached its completion. Now, work crews are busily preparing the interior of the hospital for its opening next winter. One of the striking things about the building is the amount of natural light inside. Creative use of windows and skylights gives it a fresh feel.