

stouffville up front

Stouffville: Through Other Eyes

National Access Awareness Week focuses on challenges faced by elderly, disabled in accomplishing routine tasks

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You don't know what you've got until you lose it. That fact became abundantly clear Thursday afternoon, when I joined others from the community to take part in a workshop entitled Through Other Eyes, which was organized by the Office of Seniors' Issues to mark National Access Awareness Week.

Each participant was supplied with a leg and a wrist weight, an inflatable arm band, two pairs of disposable gloves, yellow tinted goggles, ear plugs and a walking cane.

The idea was to simulate the problems faced in everyday life by people with a wide range of disabilities including arthritis, multiple sclerosis and vision and hearing difficulties.

Arm bands were placed at the elbow to limit flexibility, a problem for many people with arthritis. The five-pound ankle weight produced the sensation of being permanently off-balance, a feeling common to those with neuro-muscular diseases.

We donned our wrist weight and two pairs of gloves, which reduced sensation in the hands and made tasks most of us take for granted, such as writing, a frustrating and uphill challenge.

Next came the goggles.

Some had spots on them, others were taped to produce the affects of tunnel or peripheral vision. The yellow tint simulated vision deterioration that



Photo/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Stouffville Tribune correspondent Kate Gilderdale, left, walks down Main Street with Margaret Britton. Gilderdale was part of the Through Other Eyes workshop which had participants simulate a variety of disabilities.

is typical in older people.

Our ears plugged and our canes adjusted, we set out from the fire hall to perform a series of tasks

which, at any other time, would have seemed simple.

No jay-walking, we were told firmly, everyone must cross at the lights. By the time I'd dragged myself to Main and Market, I had forgotten how strange I must look and was beginning instead to realize how fortunate I was that I would be able to resume normal activities later on.

Staggering into the CIBC, I enquired about a variety of services, painstakingly copying the details onto my task sheet.

Concentrating on trying to hear, not to mention trying to write down information, was frustrating and exhausting.

Filling out a VISA application form was even harder, and I eventually had to give up on my search for a roofing contractor in the array of ads outside the bank, because my goggles made it impossible to see clearly and time was running out.

My problems were not unique, I later discovered. No one managed to complete their allotted tasks and most people found poor vision the most difficult aspect to deal with.

As well, participants learned that they had compensated for their temporary hearing loss by shouting at the people they encountered in shops, offices and banks.

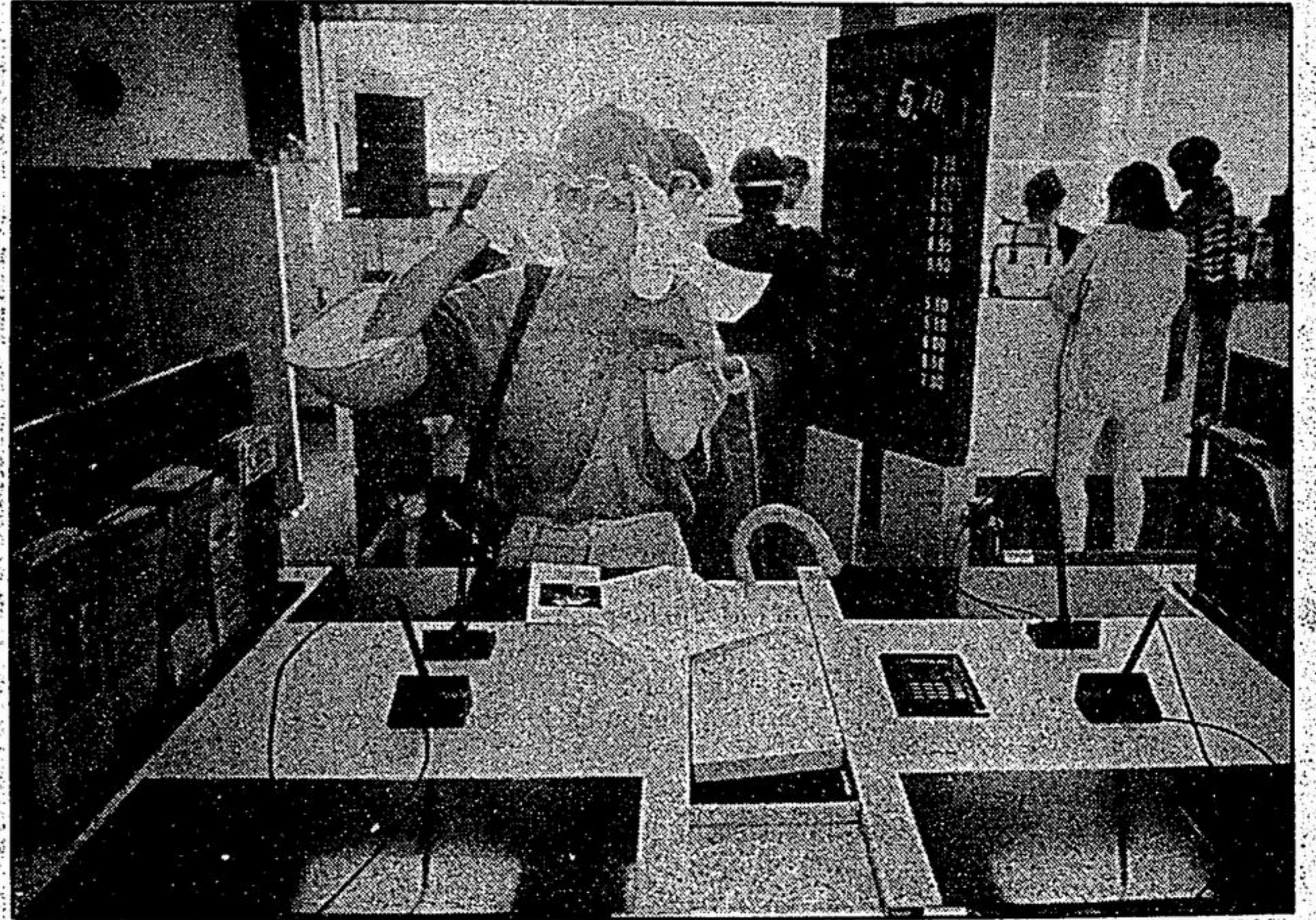
We removed our various props with enormous relief.

The experience brought home with considerable force the desperate need for Mobility Transit in this area. Many seniors and people with disabilities end up as prisoners in their own homes, because of the difficulty they have just getting out to the store or bank.

This is one workshop in which all politicians and business people should participate. Perhaps then the dream of Mobility Transit for Whitchurch-Stouffville would become a reality.



Photo at left, co-ordinator Lynelle Hamilton discusses the disability workshop prior to sending participants out into the streets of Stouffville to complete a number of tasks. Organized by the Office of Seniors' Issues, the workshop was part of National



Access Awareness Week activities. Photo at right, wearing goggles which made it hard to see, correspondent Kate Gilderdale had a tough time trying to fill out a VISA card application at the bank.

Community

Leukemia walk-a-thon Sunday morning in Stouffville

Put on your walking shoes tomorrow, Sunday, June 6, and aid leukemia research.

This annual event, sponsored by the United Food and Commercial Workers Union, gets under way between 9 and 11 a.m. at Stouffville Memorial Park by the water fountain.

Pledge sheets are available by

calling Doreen Ogden at 640-5982 or Marilyn Newton at 640-5537.

Registration begins at 9 a.m. and refreshments will be offered at noon.

Prizes and lucky draws will also be featured.

People participating in the walk will receive a T-shirt when they register.

All proceeds are donated to the Leukemia Research Fund, which is dedicated to eliminating the disease.

Almost 90 per cent of revenues raised from the walk go directly to medical and scientific investigation into leukemia and related blood diseases, as well as providing university scholarships to stu-

dents in this field.

Thanks to significant advances in research to date, 50 per cent of affected children are cured and more than 50 per cent of affected adults achieve remissions lasting one to five years or more.

Everyone is invited to come out and take part in this important and fun event.