

Alzheimer Society seeking to raise public awareness

BRUCE STAPLEY
Correspondent

The Alzheimer Society of York Region is looking to increase public awareness of services available to families with members afflicted by Alzheimer Disease.

January is National Alzheimer Awareness Month. According to society president Smith Kothari, it is essential to pass on as much information as possible to present and potential victims and their families.

"For the sake of bettering the lives of those the disease touches, the need to raise awareness about Alzheimer Disease is urgent," she said, adding that those providing care for victims of the disease need to be informed of programs and services available to help them shoulder what can be a stressful and fatiguing load.

Alzheimer Disease is a progressive degenerative brain disorder which destroys vital brain cells. It affects memory, the ability to perform basic tasks, judgment, and abstract thinking. Victims can experience disorientation of time and place, rapid mood swings and dramatic personality changes. Alzheimer Disease patients currently number a quarter million across Canada, with experts predicting a tripling of that number by

the year 2030 as the glut of baby boomers begins to age.

The public is being asked to drop off coins to the society office at 800 Davis Dr., Unit 6, Newmarket during January. "All funds raised during this campaign will be allocated to research," said Kothari.

According to society past president Joanne Cameron, a Stouffville resident, there has been strong support for recent fundraising programs in this area. "The annual Coffee Break was a big success in Stouffville last September, thanks to the work of (local merchant) Sandy Stronach," said Cameron. She said a York Region Police Choir concert in November in Newmarket raised \$5,000.

The society is to host an Alzheimer Information Breakfast at Cousens Restaurant in Newmarket Jan. 17, with tickets available by calling the Society office at (905) 895-1337.

The York Society has combined with the Canadian and Ontario Alzheimer Association to come up with the Triad Information Series to assist families going through the diagnosis process. Applicable printed materials dealing with the various stages of diagnosis and support services available are handed out on an ongoing basis with each visit to the doctor's

office.

While drugs have only been able to treat symptoms of the disease so far, Cameron said several drugs in the testing stages are providing hope. Aricept, which replaces a chemical missing in the brains of Alzheimer victims, has the society waxing optimistic, said Cameron. "Whereas once we had nothing to offer victims and their families, now we can say we have something being tested that may prove helpful. Now it's not so onerous on families when they are told a family member has Alzheimer Disease."

Services offered by the society include two day centres, which provide meaningful recreational and social programs for patients, while giving caregivers a much needed break. The original centre, located in Thornhill, is receiving government funding to handle 16 patients, but is currently looking after 28. The recently opened centre in Newmarket is already caring for 23 patients. Both centres have waiting lists.

Support groups meet monthly at the Union Villa retirement home in Unionville, as well as in Newmarket, Georgina and Thornhill. Cameron said groups could be arranged in Stouffville if there was interest. For information, call 905-895-1337.

Baha'i group hosts series of meetings on women's issues

KATE GILDERDALE
Correspondent

The Fourth World Conference on Women, which took place in China in 1995, is the inspiration behind a community-based task force sponsored by the Markham Baha'i Women's Group.

The Beijing Platform for Action Project (BPFA) was established to inform the Markham and Stouffville communities of 12 critical issues which were recognized at the conference, to identify local needs, and to bring individuals and groups together to address the relevant issues at a grass roots level, so that appropriate action can be taken.

The task force is hosting its first public information meeting on Jan. 22 at 7 p.m. in the Canada Room at the Markham civic centre. Speakers Janis Alton and Dorothy Golden-Rosen-

berg will illustrate for the audience their experiences at the Beijing conference.

Support for BPFA has been pledged by the Town of Markham, Yellow Brick House, Markham-Stouffville Family Life Centre, Aim for Change and the York Regional Police, all of whom have donated time and/or resources to the project.

The task force invites all individuals and community groups to participate in this project, said committee member Terry Poirier, who is secretary of the Baha'i Women's Group. The group is aware of the community's cultural diversity and the importance of reflecting that diversity to ensure its relevance to all residents. An action research team is assembling to collect data on existing services available to area women and the task force is inviting resi-

dents to join the team. A training session is scheduled for this Saturday, Jan. 17, from 1:30 p.m. to 4 p.m.

The task force will be conducting its second public meeting on Feb. 19 at 7 p.m.

Organizers welcome inquiries from those interested in participating and from potential sponsors.

"We hope to plan a conference that encourages the optimum dialogue between resource persons and participants," noted Poirier. "We intend to channel this dialogue into planning for future collaborative initiatives to create systematic and systemic encouragement and opportunities for women to develop their capacities."

For information, call Poirier at 294-4565 or Marlene Mogado at 472-0320.

— with files from Lorraine O'Grady

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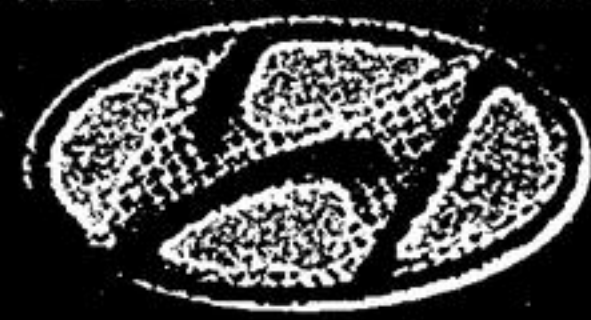
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