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STAFF PHOTO/JOAN RANSBERRY

Ontario Block Parent Association chairperson Marianne MacBride is appealing for volunteers in Markham. A similar campaign in Stouffville saved that community's Block Parent program.

Block Parents' survival depends on volunteers

BY JOAN RANSBERRY
Staff Writer

Markham's Block Parent organization is on the verge of collapse.

"It's about to close its collective neighbourhood doors in both Markham and Unionville if volunteers aren't soon found," said Marianne MacBride, chairperson of the Ontario Block Parent program.

A similar appeal in Stouffville last month drew several new volunteers as residents responded to an urgent call for help.

"We're hoping the same thing happens in Markham and Unionville," MacBride said. "If I don't get help with these programs, I may have to fold them after all these years."

Julie Stark of Unionville fears "the doors will close in September" if the community doesn't respond.

Block Parents are responsible adults who care enough about the well being of children and others to volunteer their homes as temporary refuge in an emergency.

All Block Parents are screened by police and instructed by other volun-

teers. The distinctive red and white Block Parent sign is displayed in the window of a home when an adult is available to answer the door. This tells children, seniors and others that help is at hand if they are lost, frightened or in distress.

"The sign is never displayed when the Block Parent is not available to offer immediate assistance," MacBride said.

"You can be single, married, divorced you can work or stay at home. You do not have to have children and you can be grandparents," said MacBride, adding you must be over 18 to volunteer.

A Block Parent is not a "glorified baby-sitter," MacBride stressed.

"The children are taught in school to respect the Block Parent's home and to only use it in an emergency," she said.

Being a Block Parent takes very little effort, costs nothing and is a very important safety net in the community. Sherril Holden of Markham pointed out.

"It would be heartbreaking if your child required the assistance of a Block Parent and the program was cancelled."

For more information on the Block Parent Association call 294-5868.

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