



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Lemonville is a tiny Whitchurch-Stouffville community at McCowan and Bethesda roads few people know about. Just the way many of its longtime residents like it. The hamlet has been used as a backdrop for two recent big budget movies. Walking on McCowan are David Probert (from left) Marion Wells, Jean Nauta, Blanche Cook, Jim Rae and Jane Cook. In the distance: Scarborough.

Lemonville residents savour their community

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It may be an easy joke but it sure is sweet in Lemonville.

Last month I toured around some of York Region's most interestingly named hamlets, but after breezing through on a quiet afternoon, I knew I had to return to Lemonville to learn more.

The picturesque, pond-lined stretch of McCowan Road south of Bloomington Road is a little oasis for its residents.

"We don't want them to know! It's a hidden secret," jokes local resident Jean Nauta when asked what people should know about her hamlet.

Ms Nauta was among the longtime residents who came to meet me at the Lemonville Community Centre.

Dave Probert was the most junior member, having jumped at

the chance to leave the concrete jungle of Toronto, purchasing 10 acres in the community back in 1977.

"I never looked back. I got sucked in," jokes Mr. Probert.

"It's a great community," he adds. "If you do anything wrong they tell you."

DETROIT TIGER

Born and bred in Lemonville, one-time councillor Jim Rae marvels, recalling that his entire education took place in the community centre (it used to be the school-house) under only two teachers.

"My favourite thing about the community is that we still are a community," longtime resident Marion Wells says.

And the unofficial community matriarch is Blanche Cook, who turns 99 later this year.

She recalls coming to town at

the age 16 for a chicken supper at the church with a young man named Earl Cook.

In 1936 she married Mr. Cook, a baseball player who spent time in Toronto and Buffalo, ultimately landing a brief stint with the Detroit Tigers in 1941.

Back in the day he also helped the church team when they squared off with squads from Peaches, Victoria Square and Uxbridge.

Everything shifted to pond hockey in the winter, but in the summer months it was baseball, ice cream socials, strawberry festivals and plays providing the social outlet.

"The community made its own fun." Ms Wells says.

The group easily falls into bantering about old farms, former teachers and trips to the general store. Part of that is no doubt spurred on by the fact that most of

them got the majority of their education in the very room in which we are sitting.

The current population is estimated at around 75 people, but the assembly worries that saying "fewer than 100" might make it sound precariously close to a metropolis of some kind.

MOVIE SETS

"This is downtown Lemonville," Ms Wells says of the community centre that is hidden from McCowan Road, surrounded by a flower garden and a parking lot/field.

While much of York Region has seen massive change, the population now is slightly less than recorded in 1871.

Like nearby Peaches in Markham, the name's origin actually has nothing to do with fruit.

George Lemon arrived from New York State in 1802 and was

granted 200 acres in Whitchurch Township.

The 27-year-old was the eldest of 14 siblings to settle in the area.

Despite Lemonville's relatively remote location, Hollywood has also come calling a few times.

The pivotal bus crash in Atom Egoyan's Academy-award nominated *The Sweet Hereafter* was shot in Mrs. Cook's gravel pit and the somewhat less prestigious *National Lampoon's Senior Trip* also shot in the area.

Though it has seen additions since first built, the picture-perfect pioneer Lemonville United Church looks much as it did in 1869, complete with its historic cemetery.

A lack of congregants caused it to close in the 1950s before re-opening in 1961. Today, it frequently provides a picturesque wedding locale but more importantly, residents agree, it is the backbone of the community.



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