



STAFF PHOTOS/STEVE SOMERVILLE

Inside the Greek Orthodox Holy Theotokos Convent, northwest of Ballantrae. It will be one of 12 stops on the Doors Open June 1.

COMING UP: Doors Open 2013 on June 1

# Nuns live offline in convent – mostly

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In the town's northern-most area, nestled among 20 acres of trees, trails and ponds, is a convent.

Holy Theotokos Convent is home to five Greek Orthodox nuns living a traditional monastic life.

"Our main purpose is a life of prayer," said Mother Magdalene of the convent.

The convent (4369 Faulkner Ave.) is part of Doors Open Whitchurch-Stouffville, which takes place June 1, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. across the municipality.

The nuns were approached by museum staff to participate in the annual event, which celebrates the community's heritage.

The nuns said "sure, why not", according to Mother Magdalene.

"People are most pleasantly surprised to find us. We don't turn people away. If they're curious, we welcome everybody," she said.

The semi-coistered nuns have no TVs or radios. They have access to a computer and the Internet but "it's to help us survive, not for entertainment purposes", according to Mother Magdalene.

The Internet is partially how they support themselves. The nuns make 100-per-cent beeswax candles and body products as well as sell Greek wedding, baptismal and religious items.

They're sold online and on-site.

The nuns, along with some volunteers,

go through 15,000 pounds a year of Ontario and Quebec beeswax in a renovated horse barn on the property.

The women try to produce no waste, so the wax residue is turned into firestarter logs.

People who visit the convent during Doors Open will be able to make their own tea light candle. Traditional Greek pastries will also be available for sale.

The nuns moved to the former Magna International retreat in 2001. Their mother-house in Boston was filling up, so they decided to send the Canadians back home to open a convent in the GTA under the Holy Orthodox Metropolis of Toronto, according to Mother Magdalene.

They were attracted to the eight-bedroom, four-bathroom house because of its tranquility, which is conducive to the convent.

It also has a large kitchen and two dining rooms. The sisters and any visiting priests or men eat in separate dining rooms.

Despite its serenity, it takes a lot of work by these five women to keep the property humming. They do all of the snow plowing, gardening and various other grounds keeping duties, all for free.

The nuns range in age from 38 to 71.

The convent provides for their needs and any money earned from the sale of their products is held "in common", according to 43-year-old Mother Magdalene.



Mother Irene and Mother Magdalene relax in the shade at Holy Theotokos Convent in northern Whitchurch-Stouffville.

## HISTORY, ART ON TOUR

Along with the Holy Theotokos Convent, there are 11 other properties with their doors open to the general public June 1.

They include the Lemorville Community Centre (13453 McCowan Rd.) and Latcham Gallery (6240 Main St.), both of which will have Studio Tour pop-up artists on site.

They also highlight the Ontario Heritage Trust's theme of Cultural Expressions for this edition of Doors Open. "It's just another way for people to interact with the site," said Krsta Rauchenstein, program co-ordinator, museum and town events.

The QR code scavenger hunt returns. Prizes to be won include oil changes from Stouffville Toyota and memberships to the Whitchurch-Stouffville Museum.

The 10th visitor to each site will receive a free copy of *Stouffville 1877 to 1977*.

Renew Integrative Health (6130 Main St.) is a renovated century home, doctor's office and rooming house. It is now a health centre offering chiropractic and naturopathic therapies as well as massage.

Doors Open visitors can participate in free 10-minute massages, posture analysis and gait scans.

Local historian Fred Robbins will lead two historical walking tours. One is on the town's east-end and the other is on the Stouffville junction line.

For a full list of participating locations, go to [www.townofws.ca/museum.asp](http://www.townofws.ca/museum.asp)

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