

## Going For Gold

By Shelagh Damus

Figure skating has a very public face. A persona linked to the joy and the disappointment of the on camera kiss-and-cry area of televised skating.

But there is a much less public face that is largely unfamiliar to those lacking an inside view of the sport. Figure skaters test their abilities in various disciplines on the rather unimaginatively named test days that are scattered throughout the skating calendar year.

In the STARSkate program, or what a layperson would call figure skating, successful completion of a level occurs when a skater demonstrates for a judge their proficiency in a particular discipline.

There are four disciplines in figure skating: freeskate (elements and solo), interpretive, skating skills and dance. A skater can become a gold medalist in all four disciplines. Freeskate elements tests the big ticket items: the jumps and spins, and field movements like spirals and spread eagles. The Interpretive discipline focuses on the ability to interpret music through a skater's artistry.

Skating skills are the meat of the sport, the edgework that Coach Judy Ahlgren of the Stouffville Skating Club likens to "scale passages on a piano or bar exercises in ballet." The freeskate solo is judged for both technical components and artistry. And finally, there are 21 different dances to be completed before being awarded a gold medal.

Not every child thrives in competition or

even desires it. Some may enjoy competition in other areas of their lives but not on the ice. All figure skaters begin in the test stream and progress through the various levels leading to their gold tests.

"Along the way there are opportunities to compete if they choose to, but it is not mandatory," said Ms Ahlgren. "The whole sport builds character through dedication, perseverance, and accepting retries on test day."

On test day, the skater must perform the intricate steps or movements "while expressing themselves in an upright position." Not so difficult, right? But as Ms Ahlgren points out, your head goes down when you think (try to recall a phone number and you lower your head). Skaters' brains are working just as hard as their feet but they must perform with their head up and shoulders back. The discipline obtained on the ice transfers to the rest of their lives.

"My skaters have generally been very good students in school," said Ms Ahlgren, because they also learn to "organize their time, converse with adults and take constructive criticism," all skills that hold them in good stead for now and the future.

For more information on figure skating programs contact the Stouffville Skating Club at [www.stouffvilleskate.com](http://www.stouffvilleskate.com)

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Stouffville Skating Club member Jacqueline Rintjema demonstrates her skating skills at the arena. Juliana Williams photo

## CARE & SHARE THRIFT STORE

Helping people here and around the world

By Hannelore Volpe

What can you see at the Care & Share Thrift Store in downtown Stouffville?

A whole lot!

There might be some cowboy hats and a sweater on which blue deer cavort against a white forest. Some good-looking vintage leather coats are on one rack, while a pink bunny lounges on a coffee table. You might see some wedding dresses. Red hearts are prominent in the seasonal display, making us long for Valentine's Day.

The variety in this well-kept store will surprise you: skis, toys and vintage jewellery, unique valuable dishes, tea cups and other items in the display case, lots of vintage clothing, cups, plates and cutlery, hockey equipment, fondue sets, small appliances and electronics, books and DVDs.

But there's so much more that you have to head over to the store at 6240 Main Street to see for yourself.

Every time you come in, you'll see something new.

"People bring donations all year," said general manager Elna Coetsee. "There are new treasures every day."

These are the treasures that Stouffville residents, as well as people from downtown Toronto and other areas, come to buy. As well as being a place where the local community can purchase affordable, good quality items, the store provides funds to support Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) projects around the world. It is estimated that the Care & Share Thrift Store earned between \$150,000 and \$180,000 in 2011.

Powering the store are the 80 active volunteers who come in to accept, clean, sort and display the donations brought in by the Stouffville community. Many volunteers come in for a four-hour shift each week; others are at the store four or five days a week.

The thrift stores (there are 14 of them in Ontario alone) are a non-profit marketing program of the MCC.

It's interesting to imagine the past life of the stuff that fills the Care & Share. Who owned that good-looking leather coat? Was it worn to elegant dinners, to plays downtown or at Nineteen On The Park? Were the fine china teacups on the thrift store shelves once treasured items in someone's china cabinet to be brought out for baptisms, weddings and graduations?

One day while browsing through the store, I found a large white coffee cup,

encircled with pink flowers. Fifty cents the price tag said. I bought it. For me, this cup was a blast from the past. These were the dishes given away by gas stations as bonuses for gas purchases in early 1950s Toronto, and were collected by my parents when they first came to Canada.

I enjoyed that cup for a few years before it went the way of all china - colliding with the floor one day.

When I look at all the toys and games at the Care & Share, I can imagine the fun children all over Stouffville had playing with their stuffed toys and games, their skates and dress-up clothes. Now these things are sought after by a new generation of parents and grandparents.

And as if by magic, all these things donated by the community are used to help people improve their present and future. The MCC has programs in place around the world. They work for peace, provide food and clean water, education and health care to those in need. They send quilts, blankets and hygiene, education and other kits. The MCC is there to help those affected by wars and natural disasters, and will shortly be sending a team of skilled trades people to Haiti for ongoing post-earthquake relief.

Closer to home, the MCC helps those dealing with homelessness and poverty in downtown Toronto through programs that see young people volunteer in missions, homeless shelters, at thrift stores and other locations.

A new initiative for the Care & Share is the Green Tec Computer and Electronics recycling bin that's parked behind the store, right where you bring your usual donations. Now you have a place to bring your used printer ink cartridges, cell phones, old computers, printers, etc., knowing they won't end up in a landfill site.

The Care & Share Thrift Store is truly a place that lives by the motto, "reduce, re-use and recycle".



Bob Stover, a 10-year volunteer, works on a display shelf at the Care & Share Thrift Shop in Stouffville. The store raises funds for MCC projects around the world.

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