

Shall We WheelDance?

Program transcends concept of disability

By Jill McWhinnie

This holiday season may have seen some folks give new meaning to the concept of "taking a spin on the dance floor." They're members of WheelDance program, which provides wheelchair ballroom and Latin dance classes to individuals with ambulatory disabilities.

The program matches a wheelchair partner and a "standing" partner who may be a spouse, friend, or new acquaintance made in the program. Instruction is provided in a fully accessible dance studio in Vaughan.

WheelDance is a non-profit corporation. The studio renovation and operating costs of the program have been supported by Trillium grant funding. Program founder Iris Kulbatski holds a PhD in Medical Science from the University of Toronto. Her research has focused on spinal chord injuries, and she recognized the potential psychological, social and physical benefits which could be offered by the WheelDance program.

"It's a wonderful workout," said Iris. "It develops cardio, core body strength, and upper body strength. And equally important, it provides a new opportunity for social interaction for people who may feel isolated and depressed as a result of their limited mobility. Learning a new skill like wheelchair dancing can help rebuild their confidence."

WheelDance members Nancy Clarke and Sergey Muretov, who have been dancing together for about five years, demonstrated wheelchair ballroom dancing at the Markham Accessibility Fair in November at Thornhill Community Centre. Wheelchair partner Nancy and standing partner Sergey performed several dances, including a number they had choreographed together set to the Justin Hines song Say. Sergey

is a professional dance instructor who has taught ballroom dancing across Europe and who has judged international dance competitions.

Nancy laughed when she described her introduction to wheelchair dancing.

"When I started I could barely move afterwards, but you quickly build up your core muscles. I love the way dancing makes me feel; it's so freeing. On the dance floor you realize you can manoeuvre around far more than you thought you could. And you can feel the emotion of the audience; you can see how moved they are by the dancing demonstrations," she said.

"After seeing a demonstration in Toronto Rehab hospital, a lady who had been in a wheelchair for eight years joined the program and after a few lessons, she and her husband danced together at a wedding reception."

Although wheelchair dancing is relatively new in Canada, it has been well established in Europe since the 1970s, and international wheelchair dance sport competitions have been held in Europe and Japan for many years.

"Certainly Europe is the hub of competitive wheelchair dance," said Iris. "There are lots of events there for anyone who wants to dance competitively." And while there are no major events in Canada at present, Iris predicts that this will change.

"This is a sport," she stressed. "And like any other sport, it takes an incredible amount of work to do really well. But it's also great fun for both the wheelchair partner and the standing partner. Once the mechanics of the dance steps are mastered, the partners can personalize their interpretation of the music and display creative expression in the dance. What's exciting is that the program lets people

realize what they can do, and as they demonstrate what they can do, it re-frames our perspective on ability and disability."

In this season of celebration, of which dancing is so much a part, let's celebrate this changing perspective and hope that on New Year's Eve there will be couples on the dance floor enjoying the skill, grace and

artistry of wheelchair dancing.

In addition to holding classes in its Vaughan studio, WheelDance also travels to rehab facilities, community centres, long-term care facilities and physiotherapy clinics to provide classes. For more information visit www.wheeldance.ca.



Sergy Muretov and Nancy Clarke demonstrate the beautiful art of WheelDancing at the program's studio in Vaughan. Photo courtesy of Iris Kulbatski of WheelDance.

Farmer Jack's
GARDENS

LANDSCAPE
SUPPLIES

STOUFFVILLE SENIOR OF THE MONTH

LIONEL PURCELL

Age: 91

NUMBER OF YEARS IN STOUFFVILLE AREA:

Lionel was born in Pickering and lived in East York and Rouge Valley. He moved to the family's current location at McCowan Rd. south of Stouffville Rd. in 1981.

CAREER: Lionel started out working in his father's real estate business and on the family farm in Rouge Valley. He established Lionel's Pony Farm there in 1955. The Purcell family still operates the enterprise at the current McCowan Rd. site.

HOBBIES: His lifetime involvements are numerous

and include: member (and past president) of the Agincourt Lions since 1952, acknowledged for 30 years of perfect attendance; Past District Governor of Lions International; member (and past president) of the Scarboro Historical Society since 1965; member (and vice president) of the Rouge Valley Foundation since 1985; Past Director of the Markham Fair; Honorary Governor and Past Director of the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair.

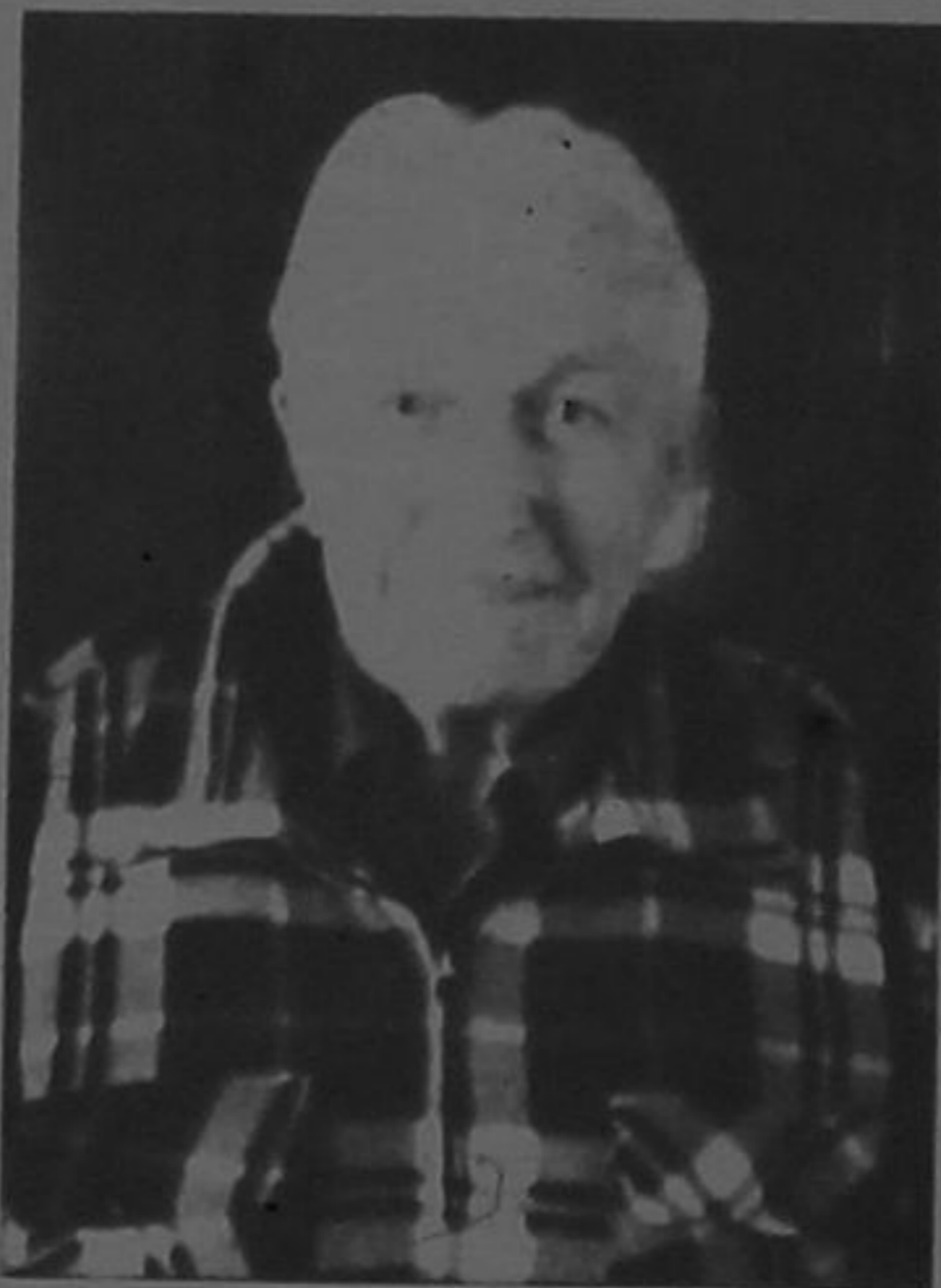
FAMILY: Lionel and Rita have been married since 1956. They have 4 children - Carrie, Mark, Blair and Holly. They have 2 grand kids. Lionel has one brother, Vernon.

PET PEEVE: "A lack of common sense."

LIFE HILITE: Seeing the success of his family in terms of strong character and integrity.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU WON THE LOTTERY? "Give some to various charitable organizations and the rest to my family."

IF YOU KNOW A SENIOR THAT IS WORTHY OF SENIOR OF THE MONTH
GIVE US AN E-MAIL AT FARMERJACKS@ROGERS.COM



LIONS CLUB OF STOUFFVILLE

BIG
Thank You

The Lions Club of Stouffville would like to thank the community for their overwhelming support of both our Christmas Basket Project and our annual Christmas Tree Sales.

Individuals & organizations that donated time, food and financial support have helped many families in need during this season of giving.

THE FOLLOWING BUSINESSES AND ORGANIZATIONS SERVED AS DROP SITES FOR DONATIONS, OR SERVED AS LOCATIONS FOR PROVISION AND COLLECTION OF APPLICATIONS FOR THE PROJECT:

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OF COMMERCE
WILLOW SPRINGS WINERY

The monies raised from the sale of the Christmas trees allows us to support many community projects throughout the upcoming year.

A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO

Canadian Tire who provided space for our Christmas Tree Project and to the families who purchased their trees to help contribute to the community work.

A special thanks to advertisers who supported the December Stouffville Free Press Lions Christmas Basket & Christmas Tree Ad, as well as Kate Goldridge, Joan Sout, & Bruce Staples for the excellent advice, communications, & ad presentation.