

If you wait to join the Seniors' Centre, you're missing out says new President



By Brock Weir

One of the first things Carol Hedenberg hears when new members walk through the door is, 'I'm finally old enough to be here ? I'm 73!'

For the new president of the Aurora Seniors' Association, it is not something she's never heard before ? but it is an attitude they often encounter at the Aurora Seniors' Centre.

Ms. Hedenberg, 69, succeeded Jim Abram as the president of the Seniors' Centre last month. A five year member of the Board, she was on the younger end of the senior spectrum when she first walked through their doors at the age of 61 looking for something to do.

'I felt a need,' she says, of what propelled her to the John West Way building. 'I needed to be out with people, I wanted to be useful and I wanted an outlet. This is the first place I came to and it was the best thing I ever did.'

Ms. Hedenberg, who has lived in Aurora for the past 22 years, describes herself as a social person by nature. Before she retired, she was a tour director on a bus travelling across ? and guiding tourists ? the length and breadth of North America, but when retirement came she found herself in a slump.

'I was staying home far too much,' she recalls. 'When you retire, you're supposed to do things differently and that is not necessarily the case. I didn't know anybody at the Seniors' Centre but thought I would give it a try. I had excellent first impressions. The people were so friendly and welcomed me in. I was able to learn new things like bid euchre and it gave me a new social outlet.'

Learning bid euchre, as it happened, was essentially a gateway to becoming more involved with the Centre. One of the instructors asked if Carol would be willing to serve on a committee and the ball just started rolling.

'Unfortunately, I am one of these people that never says no,' she says. 'It seems like somewhere along the line it became written on my forehead, 'Carol can help you do that.''

But, she adds, that is not a burden. It is strictly a good thing and it helps fuel her forward.

'It fulfils what I am looking for. I am wanted, I am needed, I am appreciated, but I get to go home at night!'

Elected at the ASA's most recent Annual General Meeting, she is the second President of the Association since Charles Sequeira's 10-year term, and the second since the ASA found its new home on John West Way. When Carol looks ahead to the challenges facing the Centre over the next few years, she says there is always a need for a bigger new building but concedes that's not in the cards.

‘That's not going to happen,’ she says. ‘Our needs now are small to what they were years ago when we just got into the building. Now, it is a matter of making sure everybody realises what their alternatives are and what there is to do, and making sure there is something for everybody.’

As Ms. Hedenberg spoke to The Auroran following her appointment, there was a heated poker tournament going on in one room, Mah Jong in another, and people reminiscing about their latest successes on the Pickleball courts.

A hugely popular sport in the senior community, this combination of tennis and badminton ‘is good exercise, everyone loves it and it is competitive,’ she said, before an athlete at the Centre weighed in: ‘It's the best thing ever invented. You just want to get better and better.’

‘I think seniors are looking to have something to push themselves for,’ says Carol, noting one of their more recent programs, adult colouring, is more her speed. ‘People think, ‘well, this is a seniors' centre, but when you come through the door everyone is here for the same reason. They want to be out with people, be social and have something to do. They don't want to sit at home and be that vegging-type person.’

‘Just because your age says you're a senior doesn't mean you are. I think the mental stigma with it is not necessarily a good thing. If that is their attitude, they aren't going to come until they are darn good and ready. You never know until you try it. Come and at least look and give it a chance. There are more things to do here than sit and play cards.’