

Men's Shed aims to foster fellowship among seniors, retirees

When Dave LeGallais retired from his veterinary practice about 15 years ago, he looked forward to a life of golf and tennis. Yet, after a few turns around the links and a couple of volleys on the court, he found that just didn't do it.

Once he got involved in the Aurora Seniors' Centre leadership, however, he entered what he describes as the best seven years of my retirement.

What made the difference, he says, was staying active, being involved and making a difference and the Aurora Seniors' Association (ASA) hopes to foster more opportunities like this when they introduce the Men's Shed concept to the Centre this month.

On Wednesday, August 30, from 9.30 to 11.30 a.m., the ASA will host its inaugural Men's Shed Breakfast, a chance for all ASA members and the community at large men and women alike to learn more about the concept.

The Men's Shed program is one that took root in Australia and has since spread around the world, including several chapters across Ontario.

Its goal is to enhance and enrich the mental and physical health of retired men, a sometimes overlooked demographic when it comes to mental health challenges like depression.

At its heart, according to Men's Shed Ontario, is to provide somewhere to go, something to do, someone to talk to.

It's a community-based, not-for-profit organization that provides a safe and friendly environment where men can work on meaningful projects, at their own pace, in their own time, in the company of other men. It's a place where some men learn, some teach, and some are happy to watch.

The program came onto the radar of the ASA a few months ago when a Men's Shed member from Vancouver spoke to LeGallais, along with Karie Papillon and Andrew Bailey of the Town of Aurora, about the possibilities.

The main concept was the fact that men, once they retire, become lonely and they just kind of shrink into themselves, says LeGallais. Men don't phone up their friends all the time or get involved like women do, so when men retire most of them just think they've got a lot of things they're finally going to do; in the first year, they finish their basement or whatever, but after that they sometimes go into depression, get lonely, and the highest suicide rate for the male population in Australia is men over 65 years-of-age.

It started up with a couple of guys in their garage and just working on some woodwork and it developed into five or ten guys. Somebody set up another chapter and they started spreading all over Australia. The government supported them and they found that the suicide rate in that group of men decreased.

Men don't phone up and talk to each other like women do; they become antisocial and the more antisocial they become the less they want to socialize it's a real cycle. I know in my own instance, I retired about 15 years ago and started playing golf and tennis, but that just didn't do it. It kills a few hours a day, but once I got involved in the Seniors' Centre and got on the Board, those have been the best seven years of my retirement.

At the end of the day, this sense of fulfilment is just what the Men's Shed concept is all about.

While still in its early days, LeGallais would like to see the local chapter dig deep over the next few months dig deep into what men interested in joining might want to get out of it. On his part, he foresees a model that includes guest speakers, card games, exercise

programs, woodshop initiatives, and getting out into the local community.

?What some of these Men's Sheds do is they get involved in the community so say a lady has a house and a broken door, some of these Men's Sheds will go to their house and repair either the door or whatever these people want, if it is within their capabilities, and they do work out there in the community, which I think is a great idea.

?We just want people to know the Men's Shed program is going to help the mental and physical wellbeing of a retired man and let them go from there. It is going to give them somewhere to go, something to do, and people to talk with and socialize with. That's what it's all about. Our main basis will likely be from our own members but I am hoping we get people from Aurora and the surrounding area to come out and see if they like the idea. If they like the idea they can come to some of these programs we're starting depending on what programs and activities turn them on ? and I think a lot of wives will like it because it will get their husbands out of the house!?

If you're interested in being a part of the Men's Shed inaugural breakfast, RSVP to auroramensshed@gmail.com by August 21. Men and women are both welcome.

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