

Put your best feet forward for CHATS and help local seniors

By Brock Weir

In just a few short years, our seniors population will outnumber the youth creating a major crunch for care, but you can help close the gaps by lacing up for the CHATS Walk for Wellness.

Now in its eighth year, the CHATS (Community and Home Assistance to Seniors) Walk for Wellness, which will take place Saturday, April 8, at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex is bigger than ever with a new location, new programs, and new incentives to get more seniors up on their feet to help those who might find it a bit of a challenge.

"It used to be a virtual walk where we just gave everybody pedometers and said, "Walk and let us know how far you walked but, most importantly, get pledges and register through our system," says CHATS' Tim Jones. "I decided to turn it into a real walk that people can come to, experience and feel it."

Formerly at Upper Canada Mall, which Mr. Jones says has been a great partner, CHATS decided to bring the walk home to Aurora to coincide with the Activate Aurora Campaign which aims to have Aurora recognized as "Canada's Most Active Community" by 2020.

"Activate Aurora seemed to be focusing a lot on the youth and the adults, but seniors are just as much of an active group," says Mr. Jones. "I said, let's put our two cents into Activate Aurora and between that, the partnership with Activate Aurora, the Town of Aurora, the Leisure Complex, Sport Aurora, and the Aurora Seniors' Association, it has shifted to become a part of the initiative and our walk at the same time."

With registration now open, this year's Walk for Wellness will feature not only the walk itself, which will take place along the Aurora Family Leisure Complex's new track, but Nordic pole walking workshops with Shawn Nisbet, quick massages from local massage therapist Gord McCallum, competitions, prizes, and an opportunity to learn.

"When the health care system talks about providing more long term care beds and more assisted living quarters, what we try to do through CHATS is, at a minimal percentage of the cost, is keep people and keep seniors who are able in their own homes," says Mr. Jones. "That way people are more comfortable. I would rather be in my own house than a facility that if I didn't need the care a facility gives me. I could get that care from an agency like CHATS and I can get a feeling of independence."

"We provide seniors who have lost their license and can't drive with transportation. We provide seniors who perhaps aren't as flexible anymore and need help with light housekeeping, or with assistance. There is personal and home support. Personal support can even help you with getting in and out of the tub, bathing, and the supports you need in that regard, and we provide Meals on Wheels if you have trouble cooking but can put something in a microwave."

CHATS charges a fee for their services, but they are fees that are subsidized so, in many cases, it is much less than the cost of commercial services on the market. While they provide a driving service of going back and forth to the hospital that is about half the cost of taking a taxi, they provide a free service picking you up after a hospital stay, stopping at the grocery and drug stores along the way, and set you back up at home with everything you need.

"You won't be back in the hospital within two days because you haven't eaten or you haven't had your own meds," says Mr. Jones. "CHATS tries to help the senior who needs that helping hand to live independently in their own homes."

When Mr. Jones started working at CHATS six years ago, they had close to 5,000 clients. Today, there are more than 8,000 due to the aging population in York Region and South Simcoe. In many cases, their clientele is not able to take part in events like Walk for Wellness, but their clients' families and caregivers are invited to come and show their support for CHATS.

"Funds raised goes right back into enhancing existing services," says Jones. "We don't want any seniors to fall through the cracks," says Mr. Jones.

For more information on the CHATS Walk for Wellness ? and to register ? visit www.chats.on.ca or call Kelley MacKenzie at 905-713-3373 x6055.