

T.E.A.M. work reigns in the House that Charles Built



By Brock Weir

As Charles Sequeira sat down for a chat with The Auroran last week, the talk was punctuated by a constant chatter from all corners of the lounge, by bells guiding rounds during a nearby bridge game, and a steady flow of visitors ready grabbing a cup of coffee or meeting up with a friend.

The scene was a far cry from what Mr. Sequeira encountered well over a decade ago when he first stepped into the Aurora Seniors' Centre when it was located on Victoria Street. It was a struggle for his wife, Lucille, to even get him to darken that doorstep when he was in his late 50s and recently retired, but after picking her up one day there was no turning back.

As President of the Aurora Seniors' Association (ASA), Mr. Sequeira has been instrumental in its growth from the then 450 members to a roster of now beyond 1,300 active members, spanning generations from 55 to 102, and in securing their comparatively new home on John West Way.

Last week, Mr. Sequeira hung up his hat as the organization's president, handing the reins over to Jim Abram after the ASA Annual General Meeting on Thursday. But, in doing so, he looks back on a mission that has undoubtedly been accomplished.

'I always believe in the TEAM concept ? Together Everyone Achieves More,' says Mr. Sequeira. 'I feel like it has come to a stage where we have done what we're expected to do. We went to Council meetings and they used to say, 'Who is going to come here? It is too far for seniors. We need to have it in Downtown Aurora.' We debated and debated, did a survey of people who would come, but it worked out.

'I didn't want to join the Seniors' Centre at the old place; I didn't think I was a senior but after I went there and saw an old friend of mine, he took me around and showed me the computer club, and I wanted to improve my computer knowledge. One thing just led to another. At the old place you couldn't do much. You could only play cards and play pool, along with the Friday night dances and socials. The Town was already working on the Old Library and the [Town offered us that].

'We came on and we told Al Downey it was not going to be any good because after five years we were going to come back and ask for another place. He said, 'I don't think so. This is the only place we had.' It went on and on and finally we went to Council and John West spoke up and said, 'What about the place in front of Town Hall? We have all the land there. Can't we give the seniors

something there?"?

Concerned that was just a line of 'B.S.', Mr. Sequeira went to Mr. Downey for confirmation, he recalls. Mr. Downey said it was true but realistically the Town was not going to hand over the land for a new Seniors' Centre. Persistence, however, paid off.

'I am a very calm and patient person, I don't get uptight very fast' and some of these qualities are good when you're working with the Town,' says Mr. Sequeira with a laugh.

Over his tenure as president of the ASA, Mr. Sequeira says the incorporation of the Aurora Seniors' Association was a milestone step in particular because it has granted them a significant degree of independence from the Town of Aurora. Unlike the Newmarket Seniors' Centre, which is very much an arm of the municipality, being an incorporation allows the ASA to apply for grant funding. They might have to abide by the rules of using a municipal facility, but they are given a long leash. Another important factor, looping back to that TEAM principle, is fostering a 'friendly' environment that welcomes volunteers.

Evidently it is a winning formula as one of Mr. Sequeira's last acts as president was to implement a new Five Year Plan charting not only the future needs of the Aurora Seniors' Centre, but how these needs can address the needs of Aurora's senior population as a whole.

That 'friendly' atmosphere has been a double-edged sword, conspiring to create an environment that is lacking in elbow room. Parking in the lot shared by the Centre and Town Hall has become a particular hot button issue, as has room within the building. They are running out of space and although new space at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex and other outdoor amenities around Town have alleviated some of that pressure, they need more. A possible solution could lie in a satellite location, says Mr. Sequeira, or partnering with new developers to provide more community space. Conversely, it is now time to start looking at keeping the Centre open on weekends to accommodate the needs of members, particularly in the 55 - 65 age bracket who are still working but want to keep active in 'body, mind and spirit.'