

VIEW FROM QUEEN'S PARK: Seniors' Centre Turns 10

By Chris Ballard, MPP
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The Aurora Seniors' Centre celebrated its tenth anniversary this past Sunday with the slogan "See how far we have come!" The Aurora Senior's Association has come a long way since its inception as the Friendship Circle back in 1964. It was located in the Victoria Hall. Back then, 75 seniors were members. Today, more than 1,400 seniors are active members of the association. Back then, 500 Aurorans identified as "seniors." Today, that number is significantly higher.

As someone who has reached "a certain age," I was delighted to join the Aurora Seniors Association last year "especially after I saw the well equipped wood shop, complete with volunteer experts to teach me. Wednesday lunches offer wonderful comradeship and I always receive a warm welcome. It's a great deal. Membership is \$25 per year for those 55 and older.

Consider this number: 148. That's the percentage by which York Region's senior population will increase between 2011 and 2031. That's almost four times faster than the rest of the population.

It is increasingly important that governments ensure seniors have the services they need in order to live healthy, safe and fulfilling lives. Staying active and involved is important to both mental and physical health.

By 1977 the Friendship Circle had outgrown its Victoria Hall location and moved into the old Aurora Fire Hall, now renamed the Aurora Seniors' Centre. The group continues to grow.

In 2002 the Town formed a steering committee to look at options. In 2004 the Aurora Seniors Association incorporated as a not-for-profit group. That same year the Town approved construction of a new Seniors' Centre and asked seniors to raise \$250,000 toward the cost. This request allowed one councilor to lament "the seniors will have to sell 10,000 apple pies to raise that sort of money." In fact, the seniors paid off their commitment within four years "one year earlier than requested by the Town.

In 2005 the new Aurora Seniors' Centre was completed and the Seniors Association, with 600 members, moved in. The 14,000 square foot facility is dedicated to seniors, but also doubles as an emergency operations centre for the Town, and the Town rents out rooms when they are not in use. Between seniors and other users, the building is a very busy place.

No mention of the Aurora Seniors Association is complete without talking about past-president Charles Sequeira. Charles was president between 2005 and 2015. He oversaw the group settling into the new facility, the introduction of new services and programs, and the rapid membership growth. Of course, there are many others who worked alongside Charles to build the hospitable centre.

The Seniors' Centre boasts 160 volunteers who put in an astounding 18,000 volunteer hours each year to run the centre. Charles says that number of volunteer hours is equivalent to about five full-time Town staff.

"The Centre is a place where seniors can keep active," says Charles. "There are plenty of activities to suit all tastes, from woodworking, to sports to dancing to crafts to cards." He adds "it's important that seniors keep moving and keep active" to make sure they have a good quality of life.

Current president, Jim Abram, adds seniors "come to the Centre for different reasons. In the end, everyone comes for comradeship." In today's world where seniors are encouraged to live longer in their homes, they can too often become isolated from the community, says Jim. The Centre is the perfect place to get out and socialize.

He adds the reason for the Centre's success is "the excellent partnership we have with the Town of Aurora." From council to staff who work in the building, the Town has been supportive of the Centre and the Association, he said.

Both Jim and Charles stress that the Seniors Association does more than take care of its own. The group is very active in fundraising for organizations like the food bank, CHATS, Operation SMILE, and the Children's Wish Foundation. They also prepared 150 holiday gift baskets last year for less fortunate individuals.

"You can't under estimate the value of volunteering," says Jim. "It builds community and keeps us young."

Thank you to the past and current dedicated Board of the Aurora Seniors Association: President Jim Abram; Vice President Carol Hedenberg; Treasurer Louise Miller; Secretary Sylvia Gilchrist; and Directors Ron Coe, Jan Freedman, Frank Leone, Bonnie Maxwell and Don Stevenson; and Past-President Charles Sequeira.