

## Donna Carson and Classic Cafe

Written By CONSTANCE SCRAFIELD

'I was a Nordic skier- that's cross country skiing,' Donna Carson told the Citizen. 'In fact, my nephew was a Nordic Skier Olympian. His father is Swiss; their youngest daughter also skis and she skied in the Olympics as well. My nephew is now a wilderness guide in the Rocky Mountains.'

We went on to talk about her life and the Classic Café in Caledon she has helped to establish and run.

'It is a fact that people are aging later,' Ms. Carson affirmed. 'And so, when I retired from 37 years of teaching English, drama and was the head of Library at various high schools, I wondered 'what next?' After 25 years in Peel Board, I was invited to apply at the Country Day School (CDS) in King City: JK to grade 12. In the library, I handled all the classes from, grade 7 to 12.

'I had gone to private school for grade 13 and my daughter came to Country Day School for grades 8 and 9 but then wanted to continue in public school and she gained from both. I worked at CDS for another six years after retiring from Peel.

'I came to realize as a teacher that my background 'everybody had a background from Britain. My grandfather was in school, studying medicine, in 1915 but enlisted and came back after the war, having seen the horrors there. Later, at the age of 80, he developed PTSD. So, the social aspect was relevant to my life and back ground.

'So, at the Classic Cafe, we have had speakers come - a lady who escaped from a camp in Iran and a Holocaust survivor, people with stories outside our normal life. I have lots of interests and I think that's what I bring to the world, as I connected with seniors across Caledon, after I retired in 2013.'

She began to outline her involvement with the Classic Café.

'I saw a sign in front of the Caledon Community Centre, an ad for a program leader needed and I thought, 'I can do that.'

'So, I expressed an interest in the program leader job to get the Classic Cafe started.'

Here is the schedule and the excellent reasons to participate: this is a roaming cafe that comes to the communities, one on every day from Monday to Thursday, with no cafe on Friday because that is 'the beginning of the weekend' so Ms. Carson discovered.

Caledon East is on Mondays; Caledon Village is on Tuesday; Alton is Wednesday and Inglewood is Thursday. On each of these days, the cafes are staged in the Community Centres that exist in each village.

Now, Southfield location near Mayfield is on Wednesday too.

Ms. Carson told us what happens and why anyone 'everyone 'even those who 'don't consider themselves seniors' should join in anyway.

Starting, 'the program supplies an hour of exercise, led by a paid person (there was a grant for that).

'Then I brought into it the guest speaker program 'and managed to do it all by myself. Everybody had to speak for free. An antique dealer, a bird seed guy, an estate planning person, the people from Spirit Tree Cidery; a potter; a speaker from the Pan Am Equestrian games. It's all been very interesting.

'The cafe is still ongoing only because the Caledon Senior Centre applied for and got a grant. The town provides the space in

community buildings but the Caledon Senior Centre has the model to organize them.?

She told us about her own schedule within the schedule: ?I do it once a month in Caledon Village and Inglewood and two a month in Alton. I lead the Nordic walking and I took my instructor training so I can teach it. We have walking poles, which I bring. that we share.

?In Caledon Village, we meet in the community room attached to the library. The town owns those buildings and their contribution is to provide the space and the Caledon Senior Centre provides the lunch and shuffleboard. It's a three hour program with guest speakers, lunch, activities along with the Nordic walk, tickle ball, bocci, scramble , banana gram -word game involving bananas; board games ?qwirkle' (sic), a brain jam and lots of laughter.?

There is plenty of room for more people to come. Why they don't, Donna Carson has an answer but first an observation: ?It's ironic that so many people could benefit in so many ways from the activities but so many people don't want to admit to being seniors. We're off on the labels. It's an honour; it costs less than the same thing would anywhere else. To come for the entire day for \$6 ? that implies that you've joined the Caledon Seniors Centre but it's not necessary. People don't know what the benefits are,

?It's a place where you're safe and having fun. You can join the Caledon Senior Centre in Bolton. You can join online or by telephone.?

She urged, ?Come on out. I don't think of myself as a senior (55 plus). Stop being offended and start reaping the benefits. You've worked for it and you're healthier than anybody this age has ever been.

?One of our speakers was 101 years and he wrote a book in his 90's about how to drive safely in your 90's.

?For this year at least, you don't have to belong to the Seniors' Centre ? just show up and try it.?

Co organizer, Leah Taylor finds the guest speakers now and she lets Ms. Carson know, who commented, ?People are discerning about who they'll come to listen to. And not every day has a guest speaker.?

The first Monday, Tuesday and Thursday of the month and the second Wednesday are the cafe days Ms. Carson attends, which means there will be Nordic walking available on those cafe days, as is a guest speaker.

As to letting people know the schedules of the Classic Café, there is a notice on the bulletin board at the Seniors Centre in Bolton. It is on line at the Caledon Seniors Centre website but not clearly identified ? have a look at ?Satellites? and then, ?March programs.?

However, somewhat surprisingly, Ms. Carson told the Citizen, ?Fifty percent of these people don't have a computer.?

?Perhaps,? she wondered, ?the local newspapers could run a small, free ?what's on' ad for community notices like this.?