

SENIOR OF THE MONTH: Retired florist Irene Schlingmann enjoys volunteering in the community

Written By JULIA LLOYD

It isn't often, that you come across someone as humble and honest as Irene Schlingmann.

Irene has been a resident of Caledon most of her life. She was born in Poland but grew up in Germany, before her family moved to Canada at the age of seven.

Growing up in Caledon, Irene experienced the town grow from roughly 3,000 people to 66,502 people in 2016. Overtime, she saw the growth of traffic, subdivisions and shopping plazas that used to never exist in Caledon.

She attended a local high school called Parkdale. And, after graduation, she continued her education and enrolled in the trades at Humber College for three years.

As Irene was growing up, she had a fascination with the simplicity of beauty and eventually fell in love with flowers and the idea of being a florist as a career choice.

"It became a passion of mine," she said. "I go by my feelings. One day I may be wrong but that's not today."

In 1970, Irene moved in with her husband Werner, who was German. They had two kids together, Mike, who is 48 and lives around the corner from Irene, and Tanya who is 46 and works as a police officer in Calgary.

Irene started to laugh as she thought back to the first time she laid eyes on Werner.

"Oh gosh. He was in a band, he was playing the saxophone clarinet and I just remember going "holy smokes," laughed Irene. "He is a real jazzy guy."

Irene and Werner have been married for 51 years. Not that Irene remembered, she had to go and ask Werner how many years it's been.

"Oh oops, I just remembered we had our 50th last fall," giggled Irene.

After high school and college, Irene started working in town as a florist and manager of the floral and garden department at Zehrs. At the same time, she also owned a Wool Shop in Bolton called Heritage Street for 9 years.

"I would work at Zehrs in the morning and then my wool shop in the afternoon," said Irene.

Irene retired from Zehrs when she was 65 and since then has really missed the customer relationship, however, since retirement Irene has taken up other jobs - keep herself active in the community.

"I help volunteer on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays at the Caledon Exchange, Riverside and Stationview senior living" said Irene.

Caledon Exchange is a place for community members in Caledon to come share ideas, participate in activities and get to know new people.

Irene says she loves being a volunteer at Caledon Exchange and making crafts, like painting rocks or even putting a floral

arrangement together.

'It makes me happy when I see others happy about something they made and it's a great feeling to say 'Hey, I did this,' she said.

At Riverside, Irene usually will cook breakfast or lunch and at Stationview senior living she volunteers to read, crochet and even just spend time with the seniors.

'I love working with the seniors and helping them, I get to see their smiling faces when they create some craft and I always hear them saying they can't wait to show their children 'they won't believe it,' and that makes me very happy.'