

# Burnaby Connexions

## Seniors Together Program kicks off for success



*The Seniors Together Program at South Burnaby Neighbourhood House show off their bookmarks*

The first day is always the most anticipated, and that is no different for the Seniors Together Program that was enthusiastically launched on Friday, February 13. As everybody walked in, Stephen Keys, coordinator of the program, greets them and says that today for lunch, “[there is] spaghetti on the cooking stove; my wife helped me make it!”

There is an agenda of activities to do today, and the excitement could not be contained as the members slowly trickled in around 11am. They welcomed each other like old friends with cheek-kisses and hearty hand shakes. Surprisingly, the majority of them met each other for the first time at the planning meeting the week before.

The Seniors Together Program is the first program for seniors launched by the South Burnaby Neighbourhood House. In an effort to bring seniors closer together in the community and stay connected, this group separates itself and claims uniqueness from other seniors groups because of its willingness to change with what members want. “We [aim] to help others figure out where we want to fit in with the community,” says Stephen. Here, seniors have the opportunity to decide the best way to do so.

“We want to create a group of seniors leading seniors,” explains Executive Director Antonia Beck, “because the best way to get seniors involved is through other seniors.” South Burnaby Neighbourhood House of-

*continued on page 2*

*continued from page 1*

fers guidance to the group on where they want to fit in with the community. This way, seniors would have an improved access to information that would enable them to overcome challenges such as language barriers and physical restrictions. The members decide collectively what it is that they want to do, and are offered the support that they need in order to do so. Offering outreach volunteer work to the community, having weekly guest speakers, or going on tours together to the local community centers are a few of the options that were discussed.

At today's meeting, the group had a small list of things they had planned to do. Maria, a group member, helped to carefully organize the spaghetti lunch and offered to help make the vegetarian option to accommodate those who could not eat meat. Jeannette, another group member, had planned a little bookmark origami project. Soon, everybody was folding and pinning decorations on their bookmarks as they ate spaghetti and chatted with each other.

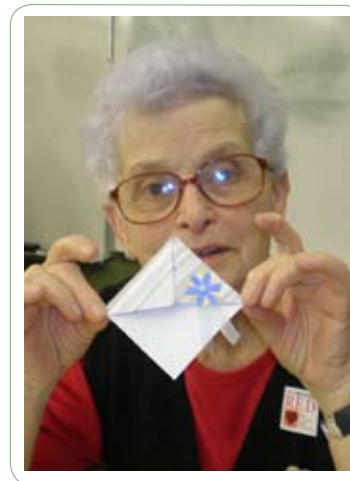
The Seniors Together Program aims to include everybody in the community, as well as those who are separated by language barriers. Already a very culturally diverse group, everybody heard about the Seniors Together Program in different ways. "Stephen approached me at a community cultural dinner and asked if I wanted to join," says Jeanette as she helped others with their origami bookmark.



*Jeanette and Zen display their creativity*

Zen, who joined the group wanting to meet new people, discovered the Seniors Together Program when she saw the poster calling for seniors as she was walking her grandson past the Neighbourhood House. She is hoping to meet other Filipino seniors and people who she could get along with in her community.

Some members are feeling a little nervous about being in such a big group. "I've forgotten what it's like to talk to adults," says Farida with a sheepish smile, "I've been a preschool teacher for 35 years!" However, she does not seem to have difficulty doing so.



*Maria shows off her bookmark*

"She's fine – she taught three of my eight grandchildren!" laughs Maria as she eats some of the spaghetti that she helped cook and passes around some homemade cookies. There is a great potential for success for the Seniors Together Program at South Burnaby Neighbourhood House, but not one that can be easily measured in numbers.

Whether it is bringing a senior out to a meeting for the first time, helping a member with getting signed up at the local gym, or educating everybody on the completion of their taxes, there are many ways to lend a hand to seniors who need it. This is more than an opportunity to share some food and make crafts – what is important is the friendship and connections that come from it.

*For more information on how to get involved in the Seniors Together Program, call Stephen Keys at South Burnaby Neighbourhood House at 604-431-0400. ■*

## Girl Guides discover a 'Girl Guides Grandma' through the Seniors Christmas Hamper

Once a Girl Guide, always a Girl Guide – that is the slogan that Claudette De-Laronde believes in when she talks so enthusiastically about her experiences and discovered talents that she was growing up in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Now a senior living in Burnaby, she looks back fondly on her memories of Girl Guides and owes it to her survival.

Last Christmas, however, she found it difficult to keep up with the expensive holiday season. Through Anne George from the Recreation Credits Program she heard about the Seniors Christmas Hamper, a new program that was organized by Burnaby Community Connections as a way to lend seniors a helping hand during the holidays with a basket of useful items.

Imagine her surprise upon the discovery that the group who sponsored her was a group of Girl Guides! The 1st Edmonds Pathfinders Unit, a group of 6 girls ranging from the ages of 12 to 13, were more than delighted to find out that they were helping a sea-



*Left to right, the 1st Edmonds Pathfinders Unit: Chelsea, Caroline, Eva, Mianna, and Nicole*



*The Pathfinders deliver the hamper to Claudette's house*

soned Girl Guide. In good will, the group has 'adopted' Claudette as their 'Girl Guides Grandma' and they plan to invite her to various events such as the upcoming Daffodil Tea.

Despite a busy schedule comprised of soccer practice, babysitting, and doing school-work, they always manage to make time to go these highly anticipated meetings every Wednesday; most of them have known each other since they were in Sparks and Brownies, and some go to the same school together. "I always try to keep them busy and involved," says Barb Cherry, the Unit's Leader. Volunteering and helping the community is important, so she is always looking for new ways to get the girls involved with helping others.

When Barb heard about the Burnaby Christmas Bureau, she thought that it would be a great opportunity for them to help Burnaby families with low-income through the Angel Wall Project or the Sponsorship program. The Pathfinders volunteered in the Toy Room, where they helped the parents pick out toys for their children. "I really liked meeting people, and where to go to get their toys!" said Chelsea.

When they learnt about the new Seniors Christmas Hamper program, it was a unanimous decision among

*continued on page 4*

the group to help a senior have a comfortable and warm Christmas, who coincidentally happened to be Claudette.

Sending a letter home with the girl's parents asking for various items was only the beginning to the Unit's mission in making an amazing hamper for Claudette, "We raised enough money from the cookie sales," says Barb, "then we went shopping at Superstore and the dollar store and had a great time picking out what she might like."

After putting together a basket of jams, canned food, household cleaning items, and baking ingredients, the 1st Edmonds Pathfinders Unit went to Claudette's house together on December 12. The timing could not have been better. "The day after, it was a giant snowfall!" remembers Barb, "We were really lucky to get it over to her early or else we would not have been able to go there at all!"

When they were there, Claudette showed the Pathfinders her wood carving projects, like the head of a woman, a wolf, and a panther. She even owes it to Girl Guides for her survival skills. "I learnt the trees in Girl Guides," says Claudette, "It has helped me so much with my carving, and living alone. I can take care of this house."

A companionship that spans over generations, this is a great experience for the girls to learn from, and pass along to others. With a hamper of goodies, the 1st Edmonds Pathfinders Unit found an unforgettable friendship and a Girl Guides Grandma!

*For more information on Girl Guides and joining, please call 1-800-565-8111 or go to [www.girlguides.ca](http://www.girlguides.ca). ■*



### **Congratulations to Claudette De-Laronde for winning the \$250 HCB Gift Certificate!**

"At first, I was thinking maybe it was too late [to sign up Claudette]," remembers Barb Cherry, "but I went through all the trouble to get the bills together!" Figuring that it was better to just try, she submitted the receipts for the Seniors Christmas Hamper into the draw.

Claudette was really happy to be randomly chosen, and is saving her gift certificate for future use. "I'm saving it for when I move," she says, "I want to get new clothes and stuff for my new place."

### **Do you have any suggestions, comments or a story you would like to share?**

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