

June: Seniors – Older Adult Month.

Good to know we have been given a month – but why not a whole year, after all we live 365 days per annum as an older person or senior, depending on definition, which in Sudbury is 65 plus. Elsewhere it could be as low as 50 like the Parkside Older Adult Centre.

Regardless, it is good to get some recognition in our still youth oriented society. In fact, there seems to be a concerted marketing effort to make us younger. The anti-aging industry is doing quite well with plastic surgeons who exist to serve our illusion that if we don't look old, we won't be or feel old; the multi-billion dollar cosmetics industry whose creams and potions promise to wipe out our wrinkles and massage away our cellulite and sagging chins. We are being sold the idea by many in medicine that aging is a curable disease, replacing all manner of worn out parts and promoting brain health food programs and exercises to ward off dementia. With all this hype, how can we resist? Maybe with the right treatment or procedure or drugs we can live forever?

However, the reality is that the longer you live the less time you have to live. It is true that we are in the uncharted territory of a greatly expanded life span where, for the first time in history, if we retire at 65, we can expect to live somewhere between 15-20 years more. The story of this new longevity is both positive and negative. It is a story in which every "yes" is followed by a "but." The fact that we can live healthier lives for a longer time is indeed something to celebrate, but could be followed by a period of decline. Longer life is not without its costs, both public and private. Resources are required to provide for a longer life and the costs of care in later years.

Many see us as old, as we are in years, but we do not often feel as old as we look, in fact sometimes we feel emotionally decades younger and with a vast storehouse of life experiences have much to offer our society and community, which too often only sees us dated and out of touch – a form of ageism.

What are the real possibilities for our aging population now? How will we live our expanded lifetime? What will we do with the years and the eventual problems that will inevitably occur? Who will we become? How will we see ourselves? How will we be seen? What will sustain us emotionally, economically, physically, spiritually? We can help ourselves, but we need the support of the whole community of which we are so much a part.

The more than 30,000 older adults in Greater Sudbury deserve not just the recognition of this month, but the opportunity to contribute to the well-being of Greater Sudbury all year long, now and into the future for as long as we can, and to be treated as equals, keeping in mind that all those younger than ourselves will eventually be celebrating a Seniors Month themselves.

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