

A Little History

In June of 1972, the Wentworth County Board of Education, because of declining enrolment, decided to close Alberton Public School. The Township of Ancaster was very interested in acquiring the building because it had become very evident through presentations that there was a need in the community for an active centre for its senior citizens. Then Councillor Barbara Ferguson led the project. She formed a committee representing the neighbouring communities of Alberton, Ancaster, Carlisle and Jerseyville to plan a centre. After some months of negotiations between the Council and the Board of Education, in April of 1973 the purchase was completed and the property deeded to the Municipality. An Advisory Board of interested citizens was appointed and immediately set to work. Under the 1973 Winter Works Incentive Programme the building was cleaned, redecorated and the grounds put in order. A New Horizons grant helped with furnishings and the Ancaster Senior Achievement Centre (ASAC) was officially opened Wednesday, **June 19, 1974**.

The original Advisory Board members were: Councillor Barbara Ferguson, Chair; Councillor John Mayo; Alice Morton, Secretary; Naomi Oakes; Theo Brooks; William Meisels; Sanford Bonham; Nancy Collins; Edward Viersen; Betty Stewart; and Norma Baker. Roy Billiald was later appointed Treasurer. Three of these members served more than 25 years, Betty Stewart (26), Ted Viersen (26) and Roy Billiald (27).

From the beginning the Centre offered all sorts of recreation to seniors, sewing skills to exercise, woodworking to card parties and special dances. Not only did the centre serve senior citizens, but it also was a recreation ground for youngsters in the area. The four-acre site contained a basketball court and a baseball diamond. The Town had operated a summer recreation program in previous years.

By 1978 it became obvious that more space was needed to accommodate the growing membership. In 1979 a gigantic fund raising campaign was held to support the construction of an extension to the original facility. A committee was formed with Jim Henry and Ash Turner as co-chairmen. After five years the Centre had raised \$85,000 and with the support of the Town, Wintario and Ministry of Culture and Recreation the \$250,000 addition of the Main Hall (plus kitchen and washrooms) was officially opened Wednesday, March 14, 1984.

Throughout the first fifteen years of the Centre a multitude of programs, activities, demonstrations and trips were obviously enjoyed as membership soon grew to over 1000.

In May of 1996, our second expansion was officially opened, giving us two more classroom areas (a games room and a dance/exercise studio) plus an expanded library area, a new lounge and a much larger office space. This \$360,000 expansion was made possible through the Infrastructure Program of the Federal Government, under which the Federal Government, Provincial Government and the local Municipal Government each paid one-third. ASAC went into intensive fundraising once construction was approved, and paid off the Town's third of the amount within a short period of the finish of construction.

In late 1997, with the advent of amalgamation, it was agreed that a written constitution and Letter of Agreement with the Town, formalizing the relationship between ASAC and the Corporation of the Township of Ancaster was needed. A committee chaired by Bob Cunliffe worked out the details.

In June of 1999, the Centre was 25 years old, and membership was over 2,200. As of November 1999, the Centre had a Letter of Agreement, a constitution, new accounting procedures and the membership election of ASAC Advisory Board members. The Letter of Agreement was approved and enacted by Ancaster Council June 19, 2000.

Also in 2000 the Advisory Board approved a storage addition to the main Hall. The entire \$36,000 cost was paid for out of the newly created Special Projects Fund.

With the City of Hamilton's amalgamation January 1, 2001, the Centre became part of the Hamilton Recreation Division. Members from the City's four major seniors' centres could participate at the Ancaster Senior Achievement Centre as full members and visa-versa.

Partnerships have played an important role with ASAC throughout its history. Aquatics are available through the City Aquatic Centre, golf through the Oak Gables Club, a walking club at Walmart, Fitness at Cedar Springs and ice-skating at the Firestone Arena.

Although our membership has declined, our participation numbers are still rising, as are the number of volunteer hours being donated by our 1150 members. Within the last few years we have done some upgrading to our washrooms, replaced some of the original windows in the building, remodelled our kitchen, lounge and boardroom, added a front porch, and installed lighting in our newly paved parking lot. In 2014 another major expansion was undertaken. A new lounge, kitchen, courtyard, office and septic system were added, making the back our new entrance. Renovations provided additional dance/exercise, classroom and library space. All three levels of government plus over \$500,000 from ASAC again funded this \$1.8 million project. As you can see, we are a busy, thriving Senior Centre!