

Pandemic has local seniors? clubs facing uncertain winter

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By Chris Drost

If the current situation with three of seniors' clubs in North Hastings is any indication, it may be a long and lonely winter ahead for the region's large senior population.

The Bancroft Times reached out to the Little Mississippi Seniors Club in McArthurs Mills, Club 580 in Bancroft and the Shamrock Club in L'Amable to find out what the current status is for programming over the winter.

The Little Mississippi Seniors Club has been active in the community since 1971. It operates out of the Mayo Community Centre where it holds everything from cards to special events, including an annual Christmas lunch. This year, club member Jim Clayton says, "all activities are currently suspended until the township reopens the community centre." The executive is considering doing a "pick-up a turkey dinner" to replace the traditional luncheon, but nothing has yet been confirmed. "There have been lots of comments from members and visitors. They are looking forward to the day when things can start up again," says Clayton.

Mike Dearborn, president of the Shamrock Club in L'Amable, says nothing will happen until the Town of Bancroft reopens the Dungannon Community Centre. There are concerns about people keeping at a distance and following current restrictions. Typically, the Shamrock Club, with approximately 130 members, has a full slate of activities for seniors with a variety of interests, everything from line dancing, tai chi, bridge, euchre, snooker, pot luck Thursdays and an annual Christmas lunch. "I have been talking with Pat Hoover from the Town of Bancroft but he is not expecting any decisions until at least Thanksgiving," says Dearborn.

Dearborn also says they want to get things going but there are concerns such as close contact in card playing and multiple people handling the cards. Most of the snooker players are eager to get back to playing, but with COVID-19 protocols in place.

Further south, in Gilmour, a small group was able to get a New Horizons grant and was able to provide one meal per week all summer for vulnerable individuals and seniors. Dearborn notes that this has been a good thing.

Like the others, Club 580 in Bancroft is waiting to hear when they can get back to their programming. But, they have some added challenges to face. The North Hastings Community Cupboard has been using Club 580 over the summer to cook meals seven days per week for those in the community who need it. President of the club, Gail Bobrowicz, has been in touch with Lianne Sauter, director of corporate services/clerk, and has been waiting for some sort of answer about plans for the winter.

Sauter had mentioned the possibility of Club 580 joining with the Shamrock Club at the Dungannon Community Centre but Bobrowicz has concerns about this. "We have people coming from north of Maynooth. Seniors don't typically like driving and driving to L'Amable would add to that. I think we would lose some of our 50 people weekly if we move the club to Dungannon. Club 580 has been around for almost 50 years and we would like to celebrate our 50th anniversary autonomously," says Bobrowicz.

Club 580 has been in operation since 1973 and while "it has had its ups and down times" according to Bobrowicz, she can't see why it cannot continue as long as the facility is available. "We have a relationship with the building. Seniors built it and looked after it but turned it over to the Town of Bancroft about six years ago when they could not afford the maintenance costs," she explained.

"I don't want to make waves but by the same token, we could have a better relationship with the town. When the Community Cupboard was put in there, there was no conception for how long this [COVID-19], would last. While the club is normally closed in the summer, we should be there now, but we have had no contact from the town. This would be a courtesy. We are not critical of the Community Cupboard being in there, but we were not kept in the loop," says Bobrowicz.