

Seniors' Spotlight

A life well lived: Lois Rigney on the power of volunteering

By Angelica Ingram

*Reprinted from Haliburton Highlands County Life,
April 14, 2016*

Surrounded by beautiful watercolour paintings depicting winter scenes that she created herself, Lois Rigney talks animatedly about her life in Minden Hills and how she came to be a year round resident.

Born in Toronto as Lois Riddell, she moved up to her parents' place on Canning Lake with her husband Ross in 1994 to take care of her ailing father, following her mother's passing.

"I said, Ross, we need to go up and look after Dad," she said. "At the time we were living in a condo in Scarborough and I said I'm outta here, I'm going north."

A year later her father died, but by then Lois and Ross had fallen in love with the area and decided to stay.

Now 22 years later, the home nestled between Lochlin and Ingoldsby is the place where Lois, 78, has lived the longest.

A former teacher, Lois taught elementary children for a few years until she had her first child, a daughter named Susan. A few years later a son, David, would arrive.

Her interest in teaching came from her older sister, who was a teacher and would let Lois help her mark papers.

"When I was a little kid I would set all my dolls up with chocolate boxes as desks," she said. "I'd stand in front of this little class in my bedroom and teach school."

Throughout her childhood and adult years Lois moved around a lot, due to the careers both her father and husband had. Ross spent 37 years working for Sears in various positions.

"During the first 18 years of our married life we had nine homes in three provinces," she said. "My mother said don't marry a travelling man and I said I'm not ... we got married and six weeks later he was sent to Elliot Lake."

When they moved to the county, Lois and Ross, who passed away in 2011, became active members of the community, volunteering their time with many organizations and serving in local politics.

"Ross was the first reeve of the township of Minden Hills and [Councillor] Jean Neville called me the First Lady," said Lois.



The pair met at the First United Church in Waterloo and both stayed active in church life, with Lois still a part of Lochlin United Church.

When she's not flipping pancakes in the basement at the annual Maplefest, she can probably be found playing the piano or helping to organize the carol service.

"I play the piano at a quarter to 10, while waiting for the minister to come from Ingoldsby and they [the congregation] sing what I say because I practised it," Lois jokes.

Lois became the pianist after her husband volunteered her for the job.

"I really enjoy it. It's made me go back to the piano and practice. It's funny how you get involved, but for me it's one of the best things that happened."

Painting is another passion of Lois's, who has been dabbling in watercolours since the 1990s. Pictures hang throughout her home, some with majestic lake scenes, others featuring snowy branches and trees.

She regularly attends classes and workshops in Minden and throughout the area, always improving her technique and looking to learn more from local instructors.

Founder of the Haliburton Highlands Stroke Support group, Lois created the initiative because the cause was something that was close to her heart, with both her parents and Ross having been victims of stroke.

Affiliated with March of Dimes, the group meets regularly for lunches, educates individuals on the signs on stroke and much more. Most importantly, they have fun.

"Ross and I started this in 2007 and we had 12 people come out. We're now up to 25. We probably average between 15 and 18 at a meeting."

When she talks about the national research being done on strokes and their effects, her eyes light up.

"I get so excited about it," she said.

Apart from the support group, another feather in Lois's cap is spearheading the creation of the Village Green in downtown Minden.

Now known as a picturesque spot with lush gardens and a gazebo, the Village Green didn't always look that way.

"This was my dream. This ugly patch of nothing between the bank and the bookstore ... why don't we make it a beautiful garden with benches and a gazebo? My thought was where men can come and sit while the women are shopping and they can read their paper."

The initiative started in the early 2000s, with Lois getting a committee together and raising funds. They were met with support from council and the community.

"I raised over \$6,000 and opened a bank account at CIBC," she said.

These passions and her thousands of hours of volunteer work have kept Lois busy, both physically and mentally, and that's the way she likes it.

"The more you volunteer the healthier you are, if it doesn't kill ya," she said. "They do say that people who volunteer live healthier lives. It gives you a purpose in life."

The Senior Spotlight feature recognizes local seniors who are nominated by CARP's local chapter in Haliburton.