

40 years of volunteer services

By Mable Hastings with support from Murielle Parkes

It seems only fitting that the Missisquoi North Volunteer Centre (CABMN) gets to celebrate its 40-year anniversary during Canada's National Volunteer Week (April 24-30) when the nation gets to thank its more than 24 million volunteers, both formally and informally. In Potton, the municipality and the volunteer centre have collaborated to hold its own annual Volunteer Party on Friday, April 29 from 5:00 to 7:00 at the St-Cajetan Church.

The CABMN was co-founded by Murielle Parkes and Ron Coughlin. Originally known as Eastern Townships Citizen Advocacy (CA), and incorporated in 1982, CA began serving Magog in 1983 in a small office in St. Paul's United Church. Ron Coughlin was the church minister and he and Parkes spearheaded the organization whose mandate was to locate, match and support volunteer citizen advocates with those needing respite. The first summer, three students were hired to visit seniors and those with disabilities.

In 1984, CA moved to Mansonville to serve the population of Potton and East Bolton, all the while increasing services to include volunteer drivers, respite care, job training, and more. A former upstairs washroom in the Reilly House became the first office; it was small but had space enough to squeeze in a desk and bookcase. Eventually, they began using space on the 2nd floor and in the attic, as well as the basement.

"From the very beginning, Ron Coughlin provided valuable knowledge and counsel that gave us both regional and national financial support from the United Church of Canada," said Parkes. "Federal and Provincial funding brought us short-term projects, but it was the National United



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MURIELLE PARKES

Ron Coughlin and Murielle Parkes in the CABMN's early years

Church grant that gave us a solid foundation to pay staff that offered a variety of programs and services," she added.

From 1986 to 1995, CA operated as a program of the Mountain Valley Outreach Mission (MVOM) employing Parkes as Executive Director, Rupert Clark as Coordinator of Volunteers and Mable Hastings as Secretary.

"No surprise that Mable worked her way up the ranks to become Administrative Assistant, Youth Director, and finally Executive Director," Parkes shared. "Ron became our first President, a role he aptly played from 1983-88."

Upon MVOM's dissolution, CA returned to its original independent charity status, gradually broadening its territory to include the western sector of the MRC Memphremagog: Potton East Bolton, St-Etienne-de-Bolton, Eastman and Stukely-Sud. In 1993, the CABMN became a member of the Fédération des centres action bénévole du Québec, a coalition of more than 100 volunteer centres in Quebec offering services, support to volunteers and volunteer organizations, and promotion of community development and volunteer action.

In 1996 CA began offering new programs at the Ken Jones Centre - an integration program for intellectually challenged adults - after purchasing a house and property at 282 principale in Mansonville. The site was used until 2003 when the building deemed no longer habitable was demolished to make room for a long-awaited youth centre with a dedicated room for KJC

participants.

June 12, 2006, the name changed to the Missisquoi North Volunteer Centre to better reflect the role the organization played in the community.

Fast forward to March 2022 when the CABMN purchases St.Paul's Anglican Church in Mansonville with the "hall" being designated for use as a Senior Centre (Centre La Plume au Vent-The Feather in the Wind Centre). Now celebrating forty years, the CABMN operates three buildings, all within a two-block radius. The main office is located upstairs in the CLSC Medical Clinic building, the youth centre located at 282 Principale, and the Senior Centre located at 309 Principale.

"Forty years later, who'd ever guess that Ron and I would still be here volunteering on committees and supporting programs and services of the CABMN on a regular basis," laughed Parkes.

Thanks to the support of three levels of government, the generosity of more than 290 donors, and the commitment of 230-plus volunteers from all five sectors of the area the CABMN is able to offer some 70-and-more programs, including services for seniors, those with special needs, and a remarkable youth programs that continue to serve youth and former youth.

Parkes and Coughlin echoed in the following statement,

"Bravo and many thanks to all who've contributed to the CABMN's success!"



Co-founders of the CABMN, Murielle Parkes and Ron Coughlin in recent years

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La Municipalité du Village de North Hatley souhaite remercier tous les travailleurs au front pour leur courage et dévouement, et pour avoir mis leur santé en jeu pour les autres.

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The Municipality of North Hatley wishes to thank all essential workers for their courage and dedication, and for putting their health on the line for others.