

A century of living

Staff Xnday Sun
April 23

Club celebrates seniors in the community

By Darlene Polachic
for The Saskatoon Sun

How do you envision yourself at 90? Will you be living a full and active lifestyle? That's what the Century Club of Saskatchewan hopes. The club's mandate is to help seniors who have reached the age of 90 to pursue physical activity, mental agility and social and spiritual creativity to age one hundred and beyond.

The Century Club began in Regina. "It is a Saskatchewan thing," says Jeanette Dean, who works with the Saskatoon Council on Aging and is chair of the planning committee for the Saskatoon branch of the Century Club.

"It is an association for seniors."

The Century Club is the brainchild of a university professor in Regina and began about three years ago. There was no branch in Saskatoon until Lt.-Gov. Lynda Haverstock announced she wanted to put on a tea for Century Club members in honour of the province's Centennial. She planned to hold the tea in Saskatoon.

The Council of Aging was in the process of planning Seniors' Week and decided to work with the Century Club of Saskatchewan to establish a branch in Saskatoon.

"First we had to publicize what the Century Club is," says Jeanette Dean. "We phoned the Saskatoon

Health District to find out exactly how many in Saskatoon and area we needed to contact. We were astounded to learn there were over 1,200 people aged 90 and over. We knew we were in for an interesting time."

The tea with the lieutenant-governor was such a success that everyone involved wanted the Century Club to carry on.

The Saskatoon Council on Aging applied for funding from New Horizons, a federal agency that provided grants for activities for seniors. The club received \$5,000 to put on five events. A committee made up of seniors was formed to plan the events.

The first one took place last June. It was a tea at Riverside Terrace where a large group of over-90s live.

"In September, we used some of the grant money to get seniors out to *Spotlight on Seniors*, a trade show for seniors at the Centennial Auditorium. We budgeted for transportation and companions, if needed. About 70 came out."

At Christmas, the Century Club was invited to a tea at Bishop Klein School. "This was very nice," says Dean. "It was primarily aimed at 90-year-olds and over who still live in their own homes. We had wonderful entertainment from the Kindergarten class and the school choir. The Grade 8 girls served the tea. They had helped at *Spotlight on Seniors*, and were



—Photos courtesy Jeanette Dean

Jeanette Dean with Leadership Advantage volunteers (from left) Jeff MacDonald, Christine Spetz and Yifei Wang

very capable hosts."

An interesting initiative for Dean and the Century Club was partnering with university students in the leadership advantage course. "This is a voluntary, non-credit course that offers practical training in leadership skills," Dean explains. "I had three student volunteers: Christine Spetz who is graduating in Honours French this year; Jeff MacDonald, a fourth year student in International Economics and Politics; and Yifei Wang, from China, who is a grad student in Economics.

"I said, 'I'm going to do a Donald Trump.' They came, sat in on committee meetings and helped with the Christmas event. Then the three of them took on the whole February event—they found a place; set

the budget, arranged the food and entertainment, as well as the transportation."

The event was a tea held at the Concordia Club. Jeff was master of ceremonies; Yifei was in charge of entertainment and arranged for a group of young German dancers and a Chinese girl to play the Chinese lute.

Christine did the rest, including arranging for anyone who wanted to have their biography written.

"Students from the Centre for Second Language Studies took on the project. They went in twos to interview the seniors. Twelve biographies were written. It inspired us to do more of that."

The final event of the five was sharing in Spring Fling which is put on by Marion Graham Collegiate under the guidance of teacher Myra Comrie. This is an annual event for seniors who live in the area; last year Century Club was invited to join them.

"We had a turkey dinner and wonderful entertainment," says Jeanette Dean. "About 75 came out, and really, really enjoyed it."

Dean says the membership of the Century Club is in constant flux. "There are always people turning 90 and joining, and other people passing away. We currently have about 140 members. They come from within a ten mile radius of Saskatoon."

As for the response to club activities: "Many, many, say how much

they enjoy each event and 'when's the next one?' We always have people phoning the Council on Aging wanting to join. The program has been so successful intergenerationally that we want it to continue."

The problem is funding. There is no government funding forthcoming for the club this year. That means Dean and the committee will be out looking for corporate and community donors.

"We are going to try doing things a little differently this year," she says, "like putting on smaller neighbourhood events. We did some evaluating and sent out a questionnaire. One question was: What would you like to see? Most people said: 'Anything, as long as you keep it going.'"

Another question asked: Have you made new friends or renewed old acquaintances through the club? Ninety-eight per cent said yes.

"The program is very enriching for these older people," Dean adds, "particularly those still in their own homes. They need company and transportation. One lady told me, 'I really want to come because I don't get to see many people any more.'"

For more information on the Century Club of Saskatoon, call the Saskatoon Council on Aging at 652-2255. Membership in the club is free and entitles members to a free subscription to Grey Matters, Saskatchewan's publication for seniors.