



North Shore News Column.

Older & Wiser

By Tom Carney

Lionsview founder's impact still felt today

WE lost a champion for seniors this month

By Tom Carney, Special to North Shore News October 30, 2011

Mary Segal, a longtime resident of the North Shore, passed away at Lions Gate Hospital Oct. 8.

Mary retired as the coordinator of the Lionsview Seniors' Planning Society in 2006 and I was hired as her replacement.

I have spent the last few weeks reading the columns Mary wrote for the North Shore News under the banner On the Scene with Mary Segal. Two things become immediately apparent. First, one could succeed Mary but it is almost impossible to replace her; and, second, Mary was working to support an active aging agenda long before it became fashionable to do so.

In her column, Mary wrote about housing, health care, social supports for seniors, etc., but her message was that seniors on the North Shore needed to be engaged in their community.

Finding ways to ensure that older people can meaningfully contribute to the community presents us with both a challenge and an opportunity. The Lionsview Seniors' Planning Society celebrates 25 years of service to the community this year. The roots of the organization go back to the late 1980s when the North Shore Seniors' Health Planning Project came into being.

The purpose of the project was to design a framework for the ongoing planning and delivery of services for seniors on the North Shore. From this initiative, came the Lionsview Seniors' Planning Society.

Mary was involved in the project from the beginning and was subsequently hired as the first co-ordinator of the society. She held that position for 17 years.

Lionsview is known as an agency that provides leadership on aging issues. We do that by involving seniors directly in the planning process and building relationships with them.

We don't deliver services to seniors directly, but we do engage the community in discussions on how to put supports for seniors' independence and active participation in place.

Our goal is to create a healthy, caring and inclusive community for all seniors who live on the North Shore. We are committed to, and much of our success is dependent on, building networks in the senior sector.

The Services to Seniors Coalition - North Shore, hosted by Lionsview since 1992, is the planning table for

senior service providers on the North Shore. The 50 agencies that make up the coalition meet monthly to connect people and services and inspire action. The coalition has Mary's stamp written all over it and as one agency representative noted last week, there would not be a seniors coalition on the North Shore without Mary.

The coalition, and more recently the formation of the Seniors Planning Table, has helped cement Lionsview's reputation as an agency that successfully influences public attitudes, systems and policy.

Mary's message was always consistent and clear. She urged seniors to get involved in the process, to become knowledgeable about the issues, to make their voices heard and when dealing with policy makers and government to «hold their feet to the fire» to make sure they carried out their promises.

In all aspects of her life Mary made connections and encouraged others to get involved. She will be remembered for her passion, stubbornness, aversion to technology and commitment to social justice.

The last time I spoke with Mary was a week before her passing. She was helping us with our latest project, the North Shore Seniors Survey.

Approximately 1,200 North Shore seniors took part in our survey, making it one of the largest community engagement exercises ever conducted on the North Shore.

Later this fall, we will be holding a series of workshops with seniors and the organizations that serve them to share the information garnered from the survey and to develop a framework for action to support seniors over the coming years.

Lionsview is committed to working in partnership with others in the community to prepare for and support an aging society on the North Shore.

We owe that to Mary and to ourselves.

Tom Carney is the executive director of the Lionsview Seniors' Planning Society. Ideas for future columns are welcome. Contact him at 604-985-3852 or send an email to lions_view@telus.net.