

Older and Wiser: Seniors Week is a time to celebrate the contributions of older adults

Seniors volunteer more hours than any other age group, notes columnist Margaret Coates

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John Peirson recently earned a Community Spirit Volunteer Award after spending three decades as a volunteer bus driver for Capilano Community Services Society, transporting other seniors from their homes to fun outings on the North Shore and beyond. | Paul McGrath / North Shore News

B.C. Seniors Week, which runs from June 1 to 7 this year, is a time to celebrate older adults for all they have achieved and for the many ways they continue to enrich our communities and our society.

The SFU Fact Book on Aging, eighth edition, says that older adults make up a significant and growing share of British Columbia's population. In 2023, people aged 65 and older represented 20 per cent of all residents, and that proportion continues to rise each year.

One meaningful way to celebrate seniors is by challenging the myths about aging that remain far too common in our society. The World Health Organization notes that one in two people hold ageist attitudes, including older adults themselves.

These mythologies about aging often diminish the reality of seniors as major contributors to our community, both historically and in the present. Seniors helped build our communities, libraries, schools, universities, institutions, social programs and much more.

The next time you say or think ‘seniors are not productive in our society,’ think again. Older people continue to contribute, through their taxes, consuming goods and services, and volunteering their time and energy – in fact seniors volunteer more hours than any other age group.

Building an age-friendly environment in our communities is another way to honour older people. In a guide on age-friendly cities, the WHO says “an age-friendly city encourages active aging by optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security to enhance quality of life as people age. In practical terms, an age-friendly city adapts its structures and services to be accessible to and inclusive of older people with varying needs and capacities.”

Access to community supports and health services is a hallmark of age-friendly communities. Supporting senior centres and those organizations that provide services to seniors is an important way to assist seniors to be active members of their communities. Senior centres are welcoming and inclusive spaces, sources of social connection and emotional support and places to interact with peers. However, as SFU assistant professor Mei Lan Fang says “second spaces available to seniors – such as seniors centres, community centres or public libraries – are often overlooked and underfunded.”

Across the North Shore, all three municipalities achieved age-friendly status several years ago. While there is still more work to be done, it is encouraging to see continued progress, particularly with their commitment to supporting programs and services for seniors and creating policies which support seniors.

There is a wide range of programs and services available to seniors across the North Shore. You can learn more about these offerings in the Seniors Guide – 2026, published by the North Shore News and compiled by North Shore Community Resources Society. If you haven’t explored these resources yet, it’s well worth taking a look.

With so many seniors in our community, it’s important that we take the time to honour and celebrate them. Many North Shore organizations will be marking Seniors Week with special events, so be sure to check in with them to see what’s planned.

Margaret Coates is the co-ordinator of Lionsview Seniors’ Planning Society. She has lived on the North Shore for 56 years and has worked for and with seniors for 31 of those years. Ideas for future columns are welcome - Email lions_view@telus.net.