



North Shore News Column.

Older & Wiser

By Tom Carney

Don't believe everything you read this year

News related to aging wasn't all negative in 2012

By Tom Carney, Special to North Shore News December 24, 2012

IT'S time for a little Christmas cheer.

Make that a lot of Christmas cheer. Social images of aging seem to come in only one variety these days: negative.

Many older persons are portrayed as needy, poor or lonely but the majority are not. In fact, recent research has found many older people to be healthy, happy and hopeful.

You'd never know that by reading some of the reports that crossed my desk this past year. For the most part the news about seniors was not good. We're told, for instance, that seniors are not eating well enough or exercising enough or that they're not well-connected to their community.

How, then, do we explain the fact that seniors are living longer and are in better health than ever before?

When it comes to our readiness for retirement the news is even worse. Apparently an awful lot of us will be flipping burgers and delivering pizzas just to make ends meet in our golden years.

The people who write these reports seem to be a dour lot. Maybe, as a Christmas gift, we should send them all a copy of the song, "Accentuate the Positive," by Johnny Mercer. "Accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative and latch on to the affirmative," wrote Mr. Mercer, way back in 1945.

What really irks me isn't the research itself, but the way some of the findings are presented. For example, according to a McKinsey and Company study entitled *Are Canadians Ready for Retirement*, 23 per cent of those polled were not saving enough for their golden years. The number for the high-income earners was even worse coming in at 41 per cent. That's the negative side.

But if we flip those numbers around we see that 77 per cent of us are saving for the future and 59 per cent of high-income earners are putting enough away for their retirement.

I'm feeling better already. Or at least I was until I came across a study from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) which forecasts that in 2013, Canada will have a household saving rate of just three per cent. By comparison, China has a savings rate of 38 per cent while India's is 34.7 per cent. Sure enough the boo birds jumped all over this study too.

Does the existence of the Canada Pension Plan (CPP) and other income programs like Old Age Security (OAS)

discourage Canadians from saving for retirement? It might. But let's flip the argument around once again.

CPP and OAS programs are a good thing. These programs have succeeded in reducing poverty among the elderly to approximately five per cent today. And seniors in Canada have average incomes that are the third highest among OECD.

Here's my point: When it comes to the research on seniors in Canada we seem to have trouble latching on to the affirmative.

Why is that? Canadians generally are an optimistic bunch.

We need some of that optimism to rub off on those writing reports about aging in this country.

It has been a pleasure writing the column this past year.

Let me take this opportunity to wish all of my readers a Merry Christmas and many good wishes for the holidays and coming New Year.

Tom Carney is the executive director of the Lionsview Seniors' Planning Society. Ideas for future columns are welcome. Contact him at 604985-3852 or send an email to lions_view@telus.net.