

OLDER AND WISER: Now more than ever, let's celebrate our seniors this week

[Margaret Coates](#) / North Shore News

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Seniors' Week in British Columbia runs until June 7.

The week provides an opportunity to honour seniors on the North Shore who have spent their lives building our country, shaping our communities, and contributing daily to our society.

According to the B.C. government website, seniors make up about 20 per cent of the total population in British Columbia, and this number will grow over the coming years.

Bringing it close to home, according to the 2016 Canada Census, seniors comprised 19.5 per cent of the population on the North Shore.

Seniors are a considerable part of our society and they play a major role in the economy and the community.

Many people believe myths about seniors – that they are a drain on society and do not add value to our communities. Contrary to what these people say, seniors today still make a difference through volunteering, sharing their wisdom, care taking their family and friends, paying taxes, working at part or even full- time jobs, and buying goods and services.

Historically, seniors contributed to the economic growth of their communities through their paid work and taxes. They contributed to Canadian culture and values. They fought for our country, educated, and parented our young, built our physical communities, ran for public office, and volunteered over their working lives.

Seniors continue to contribute many hours volunteering in the community. In fact, they contribute many more hours per year than any other age group. Volunteering by seniors adds value to communities. On the Volunteer Canada website, it states, “Volunteers and the act of volunteering bring multiple benefits to organizations, communities and people. Organizations receive enormous contributions of time, talents, and skills. Communities are healthier and more cohesive through active citizen engagement.”

Senior volunteers can be found assisting their peers with issues and concerns, coaching a sports team, working in food service at a seniors centre, cleaning up the parks and trails on the North Shore, teaching a class or an individual student, providing office assistance, and caregiving.

Nationally, more than a million caregivers in Canada are older than 65 and most of the caregiving is unpaid work which saves the Canadian economy an enormous amount of money. The Canadian Association of Retired People says that the economic value of unpaid caregivers who look after seniors can save the Canada’s health-care system up to \$31 billion annually. Seniors who provide this care deserve our heart-felt thanks both for what it does for the economy and for the care giving people receive.

Many seniors do not reflect the image of the happy golfers out on the links or those traveling off to exotic lands (COVID 19 notwithstanding).

According to Statistics Canada, 12.5 per cent of Canadian seniors now live in poverty and, between 2014 and 2015, 75,000 more seniors became low income. Many seniors do not have a private pension or retirement savings to carry them through their senior years, forcing many to work after retirement. This means that they are paying taxes as even non-working seniors still do.

I have heard unsettling things from people who think seniors are expendable during the COVID 19 pandemic. For many family and friends of seniors on the North Shore who have lost their lives to COVID 19 their passing has caused considerable grief.

A 90-year-old couple recently died, and the family said they were going to be missed as people who were incredibly instrumental in all their lives as parents, grandparents, and great grandparents.

Just like the general population, seniors are a diverse group of people, so let us not stereotype or marginalize them. Seniors contribute to our community in so many ways and we rely on their support and participation. Let us celebrate them this week and every day of the coming year

Margaret Coates is the co-ordinator of Lionsview Seniors' Planning Society. Ideas for future columns are welcome. Email: [lions view@telus.net](mailto:lions_view@telus.net)