

Revelstoke Hospital Auxiliary Thrift Store Volunteers

It's a Wednesday morning and although the Hospital Auxiliary Thrift Store is not yet open, the place bustles with activity. Volunteers chat as contributions are sorted, clothes hung out in the shop, and price tags are fixed to a variety of items. This is the hub of one of the most lucrative social enterprises in the community – one that turns back over \$100,000 a year to the community and could not function without its volunteers.

The Revelstoke Hospital Auxiliary Society is part of the history of Revelstoke. Over the years the business has grown to meet the demand of its customers. Not that long ago the Thrift Store was only open a couple of days a week, and over the years has changed location numerous times. Today, the society owns both land and building and is open 6 days a week plus 2 evenings. There are around 80 members with about 30 active volunteers who are primarily women.

Most volunteers are recruited through word of mouth; volunteers complete an application, which includes a letter of recommendation. All volunteers do what they can in their spare time. For some, this means an hour or two a week while others are there every day. The store cannot open if there are less than 2 people to work the front. Despite the fact that it is challenging to juggle the busy schedule to cover operating hours, it is a rare event that the shop does not open due to lack of volunteers.

After paying for expenses like garbage and snow removal (garbage removal is the biggest expense, and theft is the biggest concern!), all proceeds from the Thrift Store go to health related projects. There is an ongoing 'wish list' from various departments at Queen Victoria Hospital plus continual requests from organizations and groups in Revelstoke. The society also has contributed to regional projects that also serve Revelstoke citizens, like the MRI unit in Salmon Arm.

The longest serving volunteer, Pal Wheeler, passed away recently at the age of 88. Pal was at the Thrift Store daily for over 35 years and will be missed by all her Revelstoke Hospital Auxiliary friends. Another dedicated member is Mary Carlson who continues to work faithfully twice a week. There have been many presidents over the years. Patti Larson was president of the society for many years, and now Bev Wiege has taken over the reins.

For the women, working at the Thrift Store is a social event and some have become great friends. For those who are retired and or have lost their spouse it is a fulfilling way to spend free time. Hard work becomes fun. The recycling and reusing aspect is rewarding. Most feel that it is a service needed in the community and it is a chance to give back. For the volunteers there is a group lunch every Wednesday and monthly meetings are paired with the occasional wine and cheese, or pizza night.

Hospital Auxiliary Societies have 2 conferences a year, a provincial conference in the spring and a regional conference in the fall. The Revelstoke Society tries to have some members attend each conference because it's a wonderful opportunity to network with other groups. Four members attended the spring conference in Kamloops and quite a few will be attending the fall regional conference at the end of this month in Salmon Arm. Revelstoke will host the regional conference here next fall and is currently in the planning stage. The Hospital Auxiliary Society is always happy to welcome new volunteers and encourage community members to come in and see what they are all about if interested.

The interview must come to a close. After all, it's Wednesday and time for the group lunch. It's a short hour before opening time and already prospective customers hover outside the door. The women laugh and are modest about their contribution. It's the people of Revelstoke that are so generous with donations, they say, keep it coming!



Rosemarie Davies, Audrey Lally, Janine Kohlman, Joan Arcand, Grace Sessa, Bonnie Witte, Val Chamberlain