

SAGE welcomes volunteers aged 18 to 80-plus

By Evelyn Pham

For almost 40 years, the Seniors Association of Greater Edmonton (SAGE) has been helping seniors gain information, services and support.

“SAGE began in 1970 as a senior centre but then branched out into social areas like housing,” says David Loper, communications coordinator of SAGE. The nonprofit organization boasts a number of interesting and innovative services and programs designed to enhance the quality of life for seniors.

The organization provides two free-of-charge directories for housing and general information, along with programs to assist seniors with their income, tax, health, home services that connect seniors to small home renovation and maintenance services, a multicultural outreach program that engages immigrant and refugee seniors, social work services, a safe house that shelters seniors escaping abuse, and more.

Their newest program, the Full House project, is a pilot project designed to help seniors in the community deal with the issue of hoarding – gathering materials and objects that crowd into living spaces and affect personal safety.

Staff members fielded a number of requests and were not aware of another program in the city that addresses this issue, so SAGE developed the program

to help make a positive change in the lives of seniors affected by hoarding.

For those interested in learning new skills or just wanting to socialize with fellow seniors, workshops are offered on a variety of informative topics. There are sessions that deal with issues such as funeral planning and managing stress, along with courses on how to learn basic computer, scrapbooking and tai chi skills.

“Our mission says it pretty well,” Loper remarks. “I think we do a lot of innovative programs. We see gaps in the community and we find ways to fill that for seniors.”

In addition to the services they provide, the organization recognizes outstanding seniors who have made a difference in the community through the SAGE awards. The third annual SAGE awards will be presented at a gala on November 12 at The Sutton Place Hotel. All proceeds from the event will go towards the organization’s programs, particularly the SAGE Seniors Safe House.

SAGE is located downtown, at 15 Sir Winston Churchill Square. It’s a convenient place for seniors, who can stop by to use public computers and perhaps become involved with the organization as a volunteer.

Fran Swendseid, volunteer coordinator of SAGE, explains that people of all ages – not just

seniors – are welcome to volunteer.

“We’re always looking for volunteers,” she said recently.

Swendseid listed opportunities such as front desk reception, kitchen helpers and donation sorters, but adds that volunteers should have good communications skills and enjoy working with others. When asked if there are requirements to volunteer at SAGE, Swendseid is quick to respond: “No requirements are needed, but we do need volunteers to be 18 and over. That’s it.”

Some computer skills would be an asset, although not a necessary skill to have as a volunteer.

“For an organization that provides so many vital services to the community, it’s important to have volunteers to help support the programs,” says Janice Bell, director of Volunteer Edmonton. “Getting involved and volunteering, especially for seniors, is a great way to stay active, healthy and connected to others. It’s also a good way to keep on top of what’s happening in the community and become better informed about the issues affecting seniors.”

Potential volunteers need to

fill out an application form, complete a police check, which the organization pays for, and have an interview. Swendseid said the process is pretty standard, and added that the organizations is fairly flexible when it comes to accommodating volunteers – a few hours a month is all that’s needed to help make a difference.

To learn more about the Seniors Association of Greater Edmonton (SAGE), its programs, how to become a member, how

to become a volunteer or if you would like to register for the SAGE Awards, call 780-423-5510 or visit www.mysage.ca.

Evelyn Pham is a communications coordinator for Volunteer Edmonton. Look to this space to see the work that the city’s volunteers and nonprofit organizations are carrying out and what Volunteer Edmonton is involved in. For more information or suggestions for story ideas contact Evelyn at ephram@volunteeredmonton.com or by calling 780-732-6655.

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