

Bancroft Lions celebrate 70 years of service



By Tony Pearson

It was the fall of 1945. World War Two had finally ended. Mackenzie King was Canada's Prime Minister (he's the guy on the \$50 bill). The Slinky was unveiled. Toronto defeated Detroit to win the Stanley Cup (yes, the Maple Leafs used to win Stanley Cups). A number of notable people were born; in particular, it was a banner year for future music superstars - Rod Stewart, Bob Marley, Bjorn Ulvaeus (ABBA), Anne Murray, Neil Young, Pete Townsend (The Who), and John Fogarty (CCR), among others. And in Bancroft, the Lions Club was formed. Last Saturday night, it celebrated seventy years of community service.

Local Lions were joined by members of a dozen other clubs to toast the occasion. One special guest was Cecil McAlpine, now in his 90's, who as a returning Canadian serviceman helped found the club, and later served as its president - a true link between past and present. Past International Governor Gil Constantini presented McAlpine with a special pin and banner recognizing his seven decades of activity. The club itself was presented with certificates and a club banner patch to mark the occasion.

The guest speaker was someone fully acquainted with the charitable work of the Lions: Sandy Turney, executive director of the Dog Guide training facility in Oakville (a project of the Lions Foundation of Canada). Turney, who was accompanied by Roger, her own service dog-in-training, outlined the various types of assistance a dog guide can provide. She noted that while everyone knows about vision dogs, the Centre also trains dogs to assist people with hearing impairments, epileptic seizures, cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, accident trauma, and Type One diabetes. In each case, the dog's job is to help their partner achieve and maintain safe independence, including mobility.

One new program, Turney reported, has quickly become the largest: work with autistic children. The dogs relieve stress, promote sleep (often a scarce commodity for the entire family) and also "anchor" the child and prevent "bolting" into dangerous situations. This program graduates sixty dogs a year, who are placed all across Canada, but that doesn't meet demand; the waiting list for an Autism dog is now at 200.

Her canine companion Roger, by the way, is in the Foundation's newest initiative: diabetic alert. These dogs are trained to detect serious drops in blood sugar levels, and to bring appropriate food and to sound alarms. Roger is a poodle, since poodles are hypo-allergenic. The other main breed used is the Labrador, with some retrievers as well (golden and flat-coat). In all, the Oakville Centre graduates 150 trained assistance dogs a year; Turney's goal is to increase this to 200. She noted that training and placement cost \$25,000 per dog, for which no government funding is used. She thus thanked the Lions for their financial support; she also honoured local Lion Laverne Stapley for his many years of service fostering dog guide puppies, to socialize them before they are ready to take training.

Incidentally, to further indicate how long the Bancroft Lions have been working in the community, the sound system pumped out the top hits from the founding year of 1945. For those into trivia and nostalgia, these included "If I loved you" (Perry Como), "Sentimental journey" (Les Brown's orchestra, featuring Doris Day), "Saturday night is the loneliest night of the year" (Frank Sinatra), "I can't begin to tell you" (Bing Crosby), "I'm beginning to see the light" (Harry James), and "Accentuate the Positive" (Johnny Mercer). As another Harry James number stated, "It's been a long, long time".