

Crokinole on hiatus

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Mayor Libby Clarke began Crokinole game nights in Tudor and Cashel Township back in 2016. While the COVID-19 pandemic and its restrictions have put a stop to this recreational activity over the past year or so, Clarke and everyone involved is hopeful that once the pandemic is under control, they may be able to resume these game nights they've become so fond of.

Clarke says she began and has hosted Crokinole in the township on the last Monday of every month for the past several years, excluding the past year or so with COVID-19 of course. Oddly enough, Clarke says she may be the worst Crokinole player in the crowd.

"Seriously. I used to play as a child and have very fond memories of the game, but I think I lost my touch! I was invited to play Crokinole in Madoc one evening and has so much fun I wanted to bring Crokinole to our township," she says.

Square Dancing had been the big draw on Monday nights in Gilmour and they had people coming in from Gilmour, Madoc and Tweed. Clarke, who hosted the events, says that Ray Peters from Millbridge called the Square Dances and Raymond Murphy, also from Millbridge, was their sound man who played all the music.

"After Square Dancing ended, and I'm not certain why it ended, I wanted to offer another event for the residents. Crokinole was the event of choice," she says.

So, what is Crokinole? The word comes from the French word "croquignole" which means to "flick" and while it is credited as a Canadian game, it takes some inspiration from the British game squails and a game called carrom which is popular in India and Sri Lanka. Considered a sport by the game's aficionados, the objective of Crokinole is to flick discs into the centre hole of the board or into higher value fields. It can be played by two or four players and some people used a short wooden stick to flick their discs, which is called a cue.

Hugely popular in Canada from the 1890s to the 1950s, there are still many clubs today that celebrate and play this game. Tavistock, Ontario hosts the World Crokinole Championship in every year in June.

The earliest known Crokinole board was made by Eckhardt Wettlaufer, of Perth County, Ontario, in 1876 as a gift for his son's fifth birthday. The board is now part of the Joseph Schneider Haus in Kitchener, a national historic site with a focus on Germanic folk art.

As part of their Sustainability Committee funding, Tudor and Cashel Township was able to pay for eight beautiful Crokinole boards, which were made by local resident Dan Phillips. In addition to being avid Crokinole players, Phillips and his wife Marilyn also volunteered their time to help out with the game nights over the years. According to Clarke, they help with set-up, scoring and everything else.

Dan Phillips recalls that when they first started the Crokinole game nights, people would bring their own boards.

"And then [Clarke] decided to have some uniformity, so I did two boards initially, and then she asked for six more, for a total of eight," he says.

Phillips makes the boards as a hobby and only charges enough to cover his costs. He says he makes two at a time and it takes him about a week to complete them, although he says that's working on them "an hour here and an hour there."

Phillips is gratified that it really seems to catch on with people once they try it.

'I'll sell a board to some grandparents for their kids or their grandkids, and they come back and want more boards because of that. People start playing it and they're like 'yeah, I want to have a board,'' he says.

For as long as he can remember, Phillips has been playing Crokinole. As a kid, he'd play the game with his father on Saturday nights while his Mom would prepare the supper.

'I find if you don't have to concentrate. You can visit while you play so it's a good social game. I find it's just a fun game and you can try different shots. If you make it too competitive it kind of takes the enjoyment out of it, so I like to just have fun. It really brings a small community [like Tudor and Cashel] together,' he says.

Clarke seconds that, and feels that through this pandemic the loss of events like Crokinole has really affected the sense of love of community that was strong for township residents and which they all felt and had.

'Many people have grown up here and have a strong connection to each other and they truly miss seeing their friends during these social gatherings. Loneliness and depression and isolation are real during this pandemic,' she says. 'One great thing that will come out of this when it is finally over is the reuniting of friendships at our township events and that will be glorious for all residents of Tudor and Cashel.'