



More and more co-op members are choosing to age in place. Aging in place is a process that enables older members to remain in their homes for as long as possible. It can have substantial benefits for older members, their families and the wider co-op community. CHF Canada's work plan on aging in place includes illustrating the ways that co-ops can meet the needs of an aging population, for both existing co-op members who want to age in place, as well as future members. *This is an ongoing CHF Canada series.*

# AGING IN PLACE

## Member Stories

### RECOGNIZING CO-OP SENIORS WITH CENTURY OF CO-OPERATION AWARDS

On October 1 each year, co-ops across the country celebrate National Seniors Day and recognize the vital roles elders play in our communities.

As their contribution to this important date, several regional co-op housing federations honour co-op members with Century of Co-operation Awards.

These awards acknowledge years of commitment to co-operative living. Nomination is based on a simple formula—a resident's age plus the number of years the person has resided in the co-op. If it equals 100 or more, that member is eligible to receive the award.


*CHFT Century of Co-operation Award recipients*



“The idea was to recognize long-term residents,” said Tom Clement, Executive Director of the Co-operative Housing Federation of Toronto (CHFT), where the idea for the awards originated. “Co-ops are a big part of people’s lives. It’s where they chose to live and spend a good deal of their time. It’s proven to be a very popular award. It clearly means a lot to people.”

CHFT works hard to recognize and support seniors who are aging in place in co-ops. Christine Mounsteven of Charles Hastings Co-op in Toronto received her Century of Cooperation Award a few years ago. She’d been interested in co-op living since the 1980s. The idea of living co-operatively, and the chance to live in a community that offered diversity on many levels appealed to her. “It felt more like a real way of living in the community,” she said.

Mounsteven, who has co-chaired CHF Canada’s Aging in Place Committee, thinks the awards are very significant. “There have been 480 of these awards given out, and there are 109 this year,” she said. “People who receive the award always talk about the sense of community they have, feeling safe, and feeling welcomed. Many people who have spent years living in co-ops have contributed a great deal to the co-op community. Knowing you have a good, safe roof over your head contributes to your health and quality of life.”

CHFT is not the only federation giving out Century of Co-operation Awards; Peel-Halton Co-operative Housing Federation, the Co-operative Housing Federation of BC, and the Co-operative Housing Association of Eastern Ontario all hold events celebrating the accomplishments of long-term co-op members. 



## STABILITY AND SUCCESSION AT WEST GLEN CO-OP

At West Glen Co-op in Brantford, age matters. Their multi-generational board of directors is an important aspect of governance, and having senior members age in place helps to maintain continuity.

“It’s a learning process on all levels,” said Garry Munn, who has lived at West Glen for 20 years and currently serves on the board. “Even an old dog can learn new tricks. If you have a board made up of all seniors, you can lose the stability, because there could be a high



turnover. As well, older people sometimes have less energy, or are less able, physically, to participate in some things.”

Munn believes that working with younger people helps older members to understand the outlook of youth, and gives them an idea of where society is heading. This shared perspective helps the co-op plan for the future. “We ‘olds’ can learn about changes, and the younger members can learn about the stability that we’ve built into the co-op.”


Now in his sixties, Munn has no desire to leave West Glen any time soon. “I plan on celebrating my 100<sup>th</sup> birthday here,” he said with a laugh.

Jess Cook is in her third term as a West Glen board member, and her first term as president. In her twenties, Cook feels that having older members to mentor her as she learned, and continues to learn about governing a co-op, has been critical to her success. “My mom had served on the board for several years. I had seen how a co-op was run from the outside, and I wanted to see how it was run from the inside,” she said of her initial decision to run for a position on the board, something her mother encouraged, and referred to as “passing the torch.”

Cook wasn’t planning on running for a third term, but Munn and another long-term member persuaded her. “I knew the board would be in good hands with those two people on it. I knew I’d learn more, and it would be a positive experience,” she explained. She feels that sitting on the board has been an eye-opening experience. “Making decisions is not always easy. It can take time. I think learning to see things from different viewpoints has matured me a lot.”

When older members remain in the co-op, everyone benefits. Younger people, in particular, can learn from the senior segment of the co-op population, drawing on their collective experience of co-op life, and their accumulated wisdom.

Marcie Côté is the co-ordinator at West Glen. She also believes that the board benefits from age diversity. In particular, she feels it relieves concerns around succession. “Boards sometimes need re-energizing, but at the same time, it’s good if you don’t have to re-invent the wheel. It helps to have those with experience mentor younger members,” she said.

CHF Canada remains committed to helping co-ops adapt to the needs of an aging population so that authentic communities like West Glen can continue to flourish. 

There she fought in support of community diversity, aging in place, young member engagement and the campaign to protect low-income households threatened by expiring operating agreements.

“If something needed to be done, you could count on her,” says fellow Hugh Garner member and environmental activist Beata Domanska, who counted Eleanor as a friend, mentor and a vital part of the success of the co-op’s green roof and energy efficiency projects. She says Eleanor would never take no for an answer and recounts the time Eleanor led the community picketing a local pizza outlet that neglected to improve accessibility during renovations.

“Eleanor was absolutely amazing,” says CHFT Executive Director Tom Clement. He recounted events hosted at Hugh Garner where Eleanor would speak off the cuff and at length to politicians and media while top CHFT and CHF Canada government relations staff stood by in quiet amazement. “That’s the kind of representative politicians really listen to.”

Over the years, Hugh Garner has hosted influential politicians including Bill Morneau, Justin Trudeau, Chrystia Freeland, all the way back to David Crombie.

“Even in her final days, when we visited her in the nursing home as a group that included Toronto’s Deputy Mayor, although her body had clearly broken down, her mind was still sharp and she held court for over an hour talking about EOA and how we were going to win that fight,” says Clement.



## CO-OPS CELEBRATE LIFE OF ACTIVIST: ELEANOR MCDONALD

Members of Hugh Garner Co-op in Toronto and co-op members across Canada are celebrating the life of the late Eleanor McDonald (pictured above right, centre), a true champion of co-op housing and a wide range of social issues.

Originally from the United States, Eleanor moved to Canada, teaching community college, raising three daughters and supporting social issues such as planned parenthood, the abolition of capital punishment, accessibility, and working for the Elizabeth Fry Society. In 2012, she received a Queen’s Jubilee Medal for her advocacy work.


It was from the office of Elizabeth Fry that she witnessed the construction of Hugh Garner Housing Co-op and realized that co-operative housing was the answer to many social issues she cared about. She became one of Hugh Garner’s first members and directors.



*Eleanor McDonald celebrating her 94<sup>th</sup> birthday*

Former CHF Canada Director Corporate Affairs Nick Sidor worked with Eleanor often on national government relations issues and several national member resolutions proposed by her co-op and CHF Canada's Aging in Place Committee, which she helped create.

"Eleanor was a person who brought people together to stand up for the right thing," says Sidor. "Few people were as determined and persistent as she was, to make the world a better place!"

Her *Toronto Star* obituary states that Eleanor passed away February 24, 2017 in her 95<sup>th</sup> year and that her life was celebrated by the co-op in June 2017. 



## WESTERN MANITOBA SENIORS HOUSING CO-OP TO OFFER 63 MORE HOMES TO BRANDON SENIORS

A hardworking group of community-minded seniors in Brandon, Manitoba have done it again!

After opening the doors on its 34-unit first phase in 2013, Western Manitoba Seniors Housing Co-op is now looking forward to welcoming 63 households into its second phase on May 1, 2018.


We previously featured a story about the innovative funding methods that this co-op used to finance its construction. In addition to federal, provincial, and municipal funding, the co-op also required its members to purchase membership shares ranging from \$17,900 to \$21,900 per unit, depending on unit size.

Of Phase Two's 63 units, 15 are at market rent and 48 are at an affordable rent. The membership shares for six of the affordable units were purchased by the City of Brandon to offer housing to low-income seniors, who will receive a rent-geared-to-income subsidy.

"It was a pleasure to support Western Manitoba Seniors in meeting this new milestone. We encourage other co-ops to follow their example and to draw on

their skills and resources to help create new co-op homes," commented Karla Skoutajan, CHF Canada's Director, Sector Development.

The co-op's treasurer, Harvey Douglas, has been one of the driving forces behind the co-op's success. With over 50 years' experience in construction and carpentry, he's pleased to note that the construction of Phase Two has been on schedule and under budget so far. "It's been a passion of mine since I was young to build quality homes as economically as possible for ordinary people who wanted a nice, comfortable place to live."

With the cost of housing increasing rapidly in Brandon, quality homes are out of reach for many. After the co-op built its first phase, it still had more than 50 households on its waiting list. With Phase Two nearing completion, that number has grown to over 150. It's clear that Western Manitoba Seniors is helping meet an important and growing need in its community. 



Western Manitoba Seniors' Co-op members and CHF Canada staff

If you or your co-op has a story to share for CHF Canada's *Aging in Place Member Stories*, please contact Emily Doyle at [edoyle@chfcanda.coop](mailto:edoyle@chfcanda.coop).

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