

# DON F. MITCHELL



## COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS

THANK YOU, DON, FOR SHARING YOUR STORY WITH MAPLE RIDGE. LEARN MORE AT [MAPLERIDGE.CA/2016](http://MAPLERIDGE.CA/2016).

### GET INVOLVED

JOIN OR LEARN MORE  
[rmssseniors.org](http://rmssseniors.org)

VOLUNTEER AT RMSS  
[kara@rmssseniors.org](mailto:kara@rmssseniors.org) | 604-380-0517

LEARN ABOUT THE MUNICIPAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON ACCESSIBILITY & INCLUSIVENESS  
[mapleridge.ca/130](http://mapleridge.ca/130)



Facebook and see them getting involved in leadership roles for activities that were part of their youthful upbringing. That is one of the great things about Maple Ridge: as we grow there is still the small town sense of community.

#### WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO GET INVOLVED AT THE RIDGE MEADOWS SENIORS SOCIETY (RMSS)?

I got involved with RMSS when it came to my attention that they had not been able to fill the Board of Directors positions and were looking for help. In those days, the Board was very "hands-on" in running the centres, so there was lots of work to be done. As time progressed, we were moving towards a more traditional Board of Directors, giving direction to paid, qualified staff to run the day-to-day programs.

During my tenure as President, we had to close for six months in September 2018 due to the flash flood. I had to become very familiar with the restoration business and insurance coverage to try to get the centre rebuilt and open as soon as possible. Now we have the COVID-19 situation, which is very taxing both for staff and board in trying to keep our members in touch and healthy. RMSS is an important resource for our 55+ community, especially during crises and now more than ever. That's what inspired me to get involved and to stay involved.

#### GIVE US YOUR ELEVATOR PITCH FOR RMSS FOR SOMEONE WHO DOES NOT YET HAVE A MEMBERSHIP.

There are a number of benefits to joining RMSS! When fully operational, we offer around 120 different programs. Just to name a few, we have table tennis, line dancing, craft/knitting group, bridge, exercise classes, karaoke and bus trips to various local locations! We also have a coffee bar and full lunch lounge that prepares a full entrée lunch five days per week. It's also just a good place to have a coffee and conversation with someone. We also offer an outreach service for our older members, to help them with doctors' appointments, housing, and essential social services.

#### IF YOU COULD REBRAND "SENIOR CITIZENS", HOW WOULD YOU CHOOSE TO REPRESENT THIS POPULATION?

As part of the Strategic Plan, we revised our Mission Statement to Connecting Adults 55+ with a Happy, Healthy Life. We took the word senior right out of it and focused on an age. Our age for joining the society has always been 55, but most adults 55 don't consider themselves seniors. We have members at 80+ that don't consider themselves seniors yet. So the objective was to entice younger adults to join by offering programs that are more desirable for that age group. Longer hours into the evening, weekend openings, and programs that were particularly catered to that demographic. I do Zumba, Dance Cardio. I have said for a long time "Age is in the mind".

#### RMSS' MOTTO IS "CONNECTING ADULTS 55+ WITH A HAPPY, HEALTHY LIFE". WHAT MAKES YOU HAPPY AND KEEPS YOU HEALTHY IN MIND AND BODY?

One of the biggest factors in aging, and particularly in your own home, is dementia and Alzheimer's. One of the best ways to prevent those diseases is to be interactive with other people. I am extremely happy when our centres are up and running because I get to see so many members stopping in for coffee and conversation with a group in the morning. Or stopping for coffee with the group that they were just exercising with I am at my happiest when people come to RMSS for lunch where everybody can sit anywhere and strike up a conversation with someone at the table. It is good fun, educational and very interactive.



#### TELL US YOUR TOP FIVE PHYSICAL/SOCIAL ACTIVITIES TO DO FOR ADULTS 55+ IN MAPLE RIDGE?

My top physical social activities are soccer, swimming, golf, gardening, coffee or dining with friends. I play with several 60+ soccer groups in and around Maple Ridge. The trips we have taken to tournaments have been incredible. When the pool is open, I am a regular length swimmer. The golf courses in and around Maple Ridge are all good so you don't have to go far to play. We have strawberries, blueberries, tomatoes, potatoes, squash, rhubarb, onions, garlic, coming out of the backyard and they take time to cultivate and harvest. I meet regularly with a group of friends for coffee where we solve the problems of the world or just talk about life.

#### WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING FOR 55+ INDIVIDUALS TO KNOW AS THEY NAVIGATE THE WORLD DURING A PANDEMIC?

The pandemic has been a major blow to our senior population. Not only are we a highly susceptible demographic for the disease, but one of the key things to keep seniors in their own homes, feeling well and avoiding dementia is interaction with others. Our centres, when they're open, are hubs for activities that allow people to live healthy and happy lives. RMSS is home to exercise groups where 30 people, after the program, would sit down for a coffee and fill the air with conversation. It is home for people that don't want to cook for one and who instead come and have a meal with a table full of other people, chatting about anything and everything.

Since the closure in March 2020, that hasn't happened. While we hope to safely reopen our doors soon, we are still here for seniors to phone our centres and we will help with any issue they have. We can help to pick up groceries, prescriptions, make an appointment, etc. Additionally, we have been in contact with all members and regular contact with those who want to keep in touch.

We are also selling take away meals at the front door of our centres and will continue this service even if we are able to reopen in September. The biggest thing for seniors during this time is to try and keep in touch, somehow, with as many people as possible.

#### TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF.

My wife and I moved to Maple Ridge in 1974, looking to buy our first house in the Haney area. In those days, the centre of town was home to the arena and curling club, essentially where City Hall and the Leisure Centre are now. We are still in that same house and have raised one daughter and two sons. They have now gone on to raise eight children of their own! All three children were drawn to sports like soccer, baseball, softball and basketball. As a result, my wife and I became involved with community sports; I coached my daughter's soccer team for many years, my sons at various levels of baseball and my wife ran concession to raise funds. I was also President of the Maple Ridge Soccer Club and the Ridge Meadows Minor Baseball Association for a number of years.

Later, I served on the Parks and Leisure Services Commission as member at large from January 2012 to its dissolution in 2015. I am currently member at large on the Municipal Advisory Committee on Accessibility and Inclusiveness (MACAI).

#### WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE THING ABOUT MAPLE RIDGE?

I've met many good people over the years that still remain friends today. It is amazing to walk down the street or to a local store and to run into a kid (adult now) I coached who is eager to catch me up on their life. Sometimes I look on

**"I MEET REGULARLY WITH A GROUP OF FRIENDS FOR COFFEE WHERE WE SOLVE THE PROBLEMS OF THE WORLD OR JUST TALK ABOUT LIFE."**

#### DON'S TOP 5 ACTIVITIES



PLAYING SOCCER



PLAYING GOLF



BACKYARD GARDEN



SWIMMING LENGTHS



COFFEE WITH FRIENDS