

# OPINION-EDITORIAL

## Celebrating National Seniors Day 2015

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Today is the International Day of the Older Person and National Seniors Day, a day set aside in the year to acknowledge the contributions of seniors worldwide. As B.C.'s Seniors Advocate, I am encouraging a celebration of our senior citizens in this province. It may be your dad, your mom, your grandparent, or maybe it's you we are celebrating.

At the Office of the Seniors Advocate, we focus on systemic issues that affect a large number of seniors. We tackle housing and health care, gaps in home support, income support and transportation. So much of our work looks at what's wrong when it comes to seniors, but today I want to focus on what's right. And what is right are the truly astounding qualities I see in seniors as I travel to every corner of the province meeting with seniors face to face.

Today I urge you to celebrate the courage of seniors. The 80-year-old woman with severe arthritis who braves driving rain, but still walks several kilometres to and from the grocery store to get supplies for dinner. The father who decides to become a university student for the first time at 70. The widowed grandparent who steps up to parent a grandchild after raising five kids of her own.

Today is a day to celebrate the selflessness of seniors. In virtually every sector of society it's easy to see this in action. Individual seniors want to help in the diverse communities they live in. According to StatsCan, Canadians 65 and over, volunteer on average 220 hours per year, higher than any age group. They do it not for their resumes or for graduation requirements, they do it for the most part, because they get a deep satisfaction from helping others. One look at the composition of our service groups tells us this kind of giving is being lost as time goes on.

What I am also reflecting on today is the profound commitment and tenacity I see in many of the seniors I meet. I think of the wife who traveled hours each day by bus to be with her husband at mealtimes. I remember the letter I received from an 83-year-old man who is caring for his wife with severe dementia, declining home support saying he just wants to be the one to put her to bed each night. The seniors I hear from know what they want and many of them are willing to fight, and fight hard to get what they feel they and their loved ones deserve.

I'd like us to also acknowledge another extraordinary quality that so many of our older citizens possess - an unbelievable ability to adapt to change, not just small shifts in the way things are done, but dramatic societal change on a global scale. The variety and magnitude of change that our older population has experienced is almost unfathomable - from streetcars to high-speed trains, brooms to vacuum robots, inkwells to iPads, courtship to online dating, and the list goes on.

The individual contributions of our seniors could fill this newspaper for decades to come. It's these unique experiences of the older people in your life I invite you to celebrate today. Seniors are not all the same. Their likes and dislikes, choices and needs are as different at 80, as they were at 18. Today we aren't celebrating "seniors" we are celebrating Edna, Bev, Mohinder, Walter and the other 816,000 amazing individuals who happen to be over 65 living in this province. On this day, we say a heartfelt thank you to everything you offer all of us.