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## OPINION-EDITORIAL

### Seniors Week in B.C.

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**(601 words)**

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VICTORIA – The week of June 2, 2014, has been proclaimed Seniors Week in British Columbia.

As I have been travelling the province and meeting with seniors, I am reminded that age is no barrier to what one can do for oneself and what one can do for others.

Many seniors have needs that are genuine and legitimate, but we also must remember and recognize the contribution that seniors make and the value they add to our communities. When we really think about it, seniors give and contribute much more to society than they get in return.

Yes, it is important to thank our seniors for what they have done. They have fought in wars, helped to build our country and have broken any number of social and racial barriers, but it is equally important to thank them for what they are continuing to do each day for us and for each other.

If in doubt, just think what would happen in this province if everyone over the age of 65 simply “downed tools” for the day. It is seniors who are volunteering in our community centres, delivering meals on wheels, fundraising for housing, serving on boards of directors of community organizations, organizing church functions and providing care for a spouse and often grandchildren, just to name a few.

Without the efforts and contributions that seniors continue to make long after they have left the paid workforce, our governments at the federal, provincial and local levels would be faced with a massive bill for the services they would need to pay people to provide.

Seniors are a varied bunch, just as they were before they turned 65. While many are volunteering and serving as caregivers, many are also continuing to blaze a trail.

Age is just a number, not an indication of ability or ambition. Just ask Mick Jagger, a great-grandfather at the age of 70, or Clint Eastwood, who is directing his latest movie at the age of 84. Nelson Mandela was 75 when he was elected President of South Africa. “Grandma Moses” first picked up a paintbrush at the age of 76 and was still working on her art, which hangs in

museums in Vienna and Paris, at the age of 99. Doris Haddock was 89 when she began the 5,000-kilometre walk from Los Angeles to Washington, D.C., and 90 when she finished it 14 months later.

Right here in B.C. I met Mae Irving at the South Granville Seniors Centre, where they were hosting her 102nd birthday lunch, but not until she had completed her exercise class, where she was able to keep up with women 20 years younger. That would be 82!

These and many other age-oblivious accomplishments should be sharp reminders to those of us who help shape policies that seniors are perfectly able to know what they want and that it will not be the same for everyone.

The number one desire of seniors is to remain as independent as possible for as long as possible and recognizing that independence looks different for different people. As we celebrate seniors, let's remember not just what they have done, but what they are doing and can do.

Most seniors want to help themselves and others. It is our collective responsibility to ensure they have the tools, supports and services to realize their full potential. For those seniors who require greater care and protection, we must ensure that they can live with dignity in a safe and comfortable environment.

Today it may be our mother, grandmother or great grandmother, but someday it will be us.

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