

What Does Community Mean To You?

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Since October of 2005, I have been president of the English Communities Committee of the CSSS des Sommets. I have also sat as a member of the board of the Laurentian Club for 7 of the 15 years since its founding, and am now halfway through a two-year term as president. Over time I have also been the president of the Ste. Agathe Academy Parents' Committee, founder of a group that sponsored Cambodian refugees during the Boat People crisis of 1978-79, co-founder and managing director of the Canada Day Committee in Ste. Agathe from 1995 to 2000, and I have been a member of or director of numerous other community groups, all the while raising a family and building a running a small business with my husband, Joseph Graham.

All of these groups have one thing in common: community. Communities cannot exist without the involvement of their members, who work together for the common good. Each of the groups I have been involved in has brought together people who share a vision of community, and are willing to put the time and energy in to make things happen. Many of these groups are single-issue ones, designed to rally people around to solve a specific problem. Others have existed as social clubs, to bring people together in a setting that allows them to exchange with each other. Still others have a larger purpose, such as the CSSS English Communities Committee whose purpose is to ensure that health and social services are available in English in a culturally sensitive way to those who require them.

But what are the English communities of the Laurentians? They don't have a physical centre, as municipalities or neighbourhoods do for the French-speaking majority. There aren't even many institutions that can rightfully claim to be central to our lives, only the few schools and churches that serve the thinly-spread population using English in their homes and everyday lives. What then is their centre, what ties together all these people across the length and breadth of the Laurentians?

One thing that does is this newspaper you have in your hands. It is the only means of communication we have to draw all the threads of our communities together and even it doesn't reach more than a portion of our population.

That leaves us, each one of us – you and me – to be the link to other people, to be the one who helps bind us together for mutual aid, support and amusement. How can we do that? By joining together with other members of our community and helping it to function. Come out to meetings and to other events, encourage others to as well. Spread the word about Main Street and its sister publication, the on-line edition called Main Street Week. And volunteer to help out in any way you can to build and maintain the groups that are there to support the English communities because, without all of us pulling together, there won't be any community for us. Don't assume that if you do nothing, someone else will take up the slack. Assume that if you do nothing, nothing will be done.

Sheila Eskenazi, President, English Communities Committee of the CSSS des Sommets