

Local Community Services

December 2010

Last month's column, centring on the Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board, elicited lots of response from readers, many of whom requested more information on services available to the English communities across the Laurentians. While I can't give you an exhaustive list of those services, I can provide an overview, including how to find some specific services that you require.

The principal ones with which I am familiar are the health and social services network and the educational services offered by the Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board. As mentioned last month, there are seven elementary and three high schools serving the English-speaking population of the Laurentians, from Lachute to Arundel, St. Jerome to Ste. Agathe. There is also an adult-learning centre in Lachute, which includes a recently introduced course for caregivers, set up at the instigation of Christina Vincelli and the team at Laurentians CARE. The provincial government regulates eligibility for English schooling at the elementary and high school levels and the school board must follow the prescribed procedures in order to admit a student. Except for those families living in or near to Ste. Agathe and Lachute, long bus rides are part of the high school experience.

There is no post-secondary education available in English in the Laurentians, and our young people must move on to Montreal, or, less often, to Lennoxville or Gatineau, to continue at the CEGEP level. You can get more information from the board at www.swlauriersb.qc.ca or by phone at 1-866-621-5600.

For the purposes of providing health and social services, the territory is broken down into 8 zones, equivalent to the MRCs. As discussed in my October column, the provision of services in English is very limited but much more than the minimum requirements are given by the establishments on a good will basis, through the employment of bilingual staff and professionals. In addition, Laurentians CARE is providing a central clearinghouse for caregivers and those needing care to find resources, help, training and support. Look for more information elsewhere in this paper.

Other basic services available to the population less centralized. There is a range of churches throughout the region, serving many different denominations. The only year-round synagogue in Quebec outside of Montreal is in Ste. Agathe and there are a number of seasonal synagogues in the area, open only in the summer. Several municipal libraries have extensive collections of English books, and some provide additional programs, including those in Arundel and Morin Heights. However, if you live in a municipality whose library is limited in its offerings, you can ask to have books borrowed through the central network, the Réseau BIBLIO des Laurentides, which has its own stock and can also do inter-library loans. If there is something you would like to read, ask your local librarian.

Many other services are available in English, but on an individual basis. This newspaper is the ideal source for finding professionals, merchants, craftspeople and other services and events. You know that, if they have advertised here, they are in tune with the needs and desires of the English-speaking population. When you do purchase a product or service, make sure that you mention that you saw them in Main Street. That will reinforce and spread the desire to serve us in the language of our choice.

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