



About Men's Sheds

Looking Forward to What the Day Brings

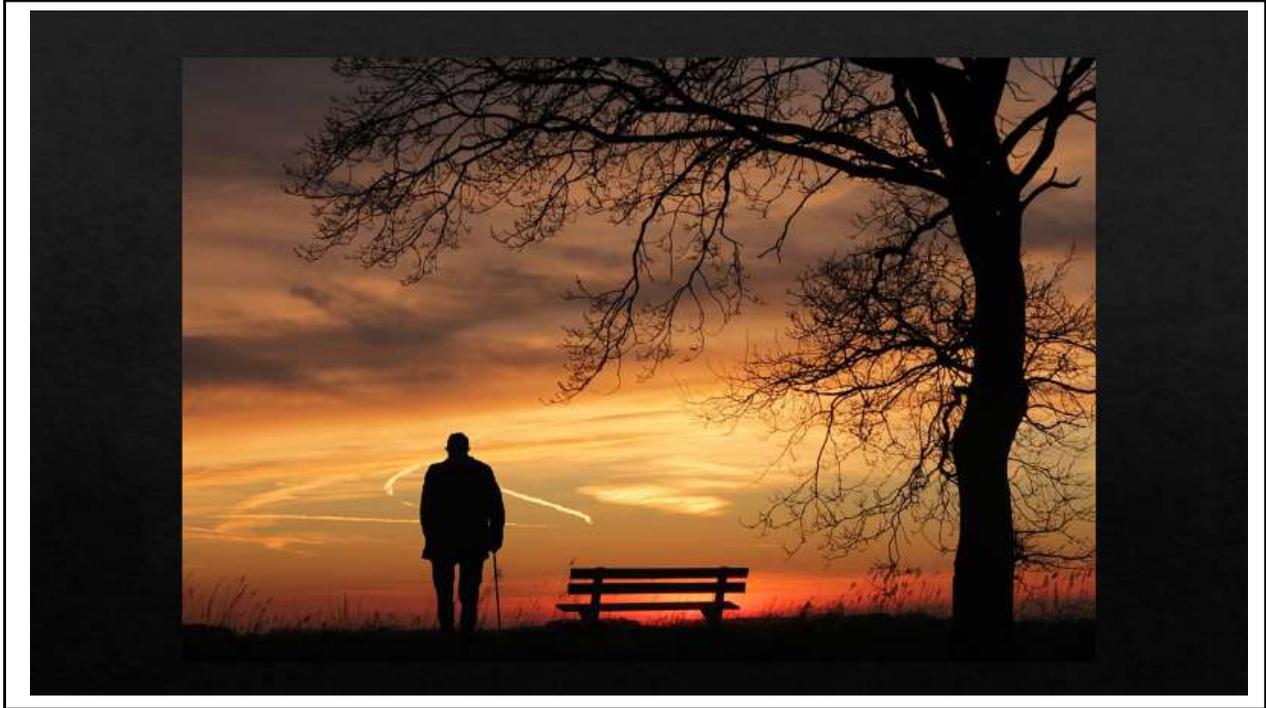
Good morning. I'm David Steventon, leader of the Naismith Men's Shed in Mississippi Mills, Ontario. I'm delighted to be hear to talk about men's sheds.

1. Cover Slide

During a recent conversation with a 39-year-old male acquaintance it was explained to me that the feelings of depression grew gradually and eventually to a pitch where he would simply burst into tears for no apparent reason while petting his cat prior to leaving for work. He said, "You feel yourself falling into this dark pit of despair and there's no way to stop the decent into this black hole that seems to have no way out. I can understand why some guys opt for the easy escape of ending it all".

Thankfully my friend managed to find a physician who listened to him. He is now on a course of medication to combat anxiety. The transformation is amazing. I have my friend from the past back, willing to socialize and see the humor in many things.

I mention this because it is a condition that hits all ages. For seniors the probability of encountering such feelings is exacerbated due to the major lifestyle change brought about by working one day and being cast loose into retirement the next.



Plus, a Canadian organization helping boomers retain purpose in Boomers their lives recently addressed the plight of male boomers in their latest edition of the magazine, Pulse.

It says that:

- It is now generally acknowledged that the male boomer population faces challenges when it comes to loneliness which is often ignored as they struggle to make friends, cope and socialize, compared to their female counterparts. Male boomers often want to enjoy friendship and companionship in an exclusively male environment.

- Men are often unprepared to deal with the life of boredom and isolation that comes with retiring from active work life. The transition is a self-realization process for boomers as their social network shrinks and health issues grow.

The American Journal of Men's Health revealed that men over 65 who are unpartnered and have low socioeconomic status, limited social networks, low levels of participation, and poor mental health are associated with loneliness. The study suggests that proper mental health and discovering purpose in life helps decrease loneliness in men.

And that loneliness is considered a health risk for boomers. It can lead to dementia and possibly cut a boomer's life short. This makes it highly important to create an environment where men can have a safe space to express themselves and find a community. Men usually don't like to ask for help or express themselves compared to women, making it harder to point out symptoms of loneliness. Canada faces the probability of an epidemic of social isolation, loneliness and depression faced by a growing senior's population. By 2030, as the last of the boomers retire, it is estimated that 25% of the Canadian population will be 65-year-old or older.

So many men face these social challenges due to such things as the impact of retirement, loss of their spouse, downsizing and losing all their friends by moving to a different community. Wives might give them flack for getting underfoot! There is a saying that a retired husband means twice as much husband and half as much income. Also, they might face the realization and disillusionment that retirement has failed to meet their expectations and thus prefer to drop out

of the social network.



Son's of Rest, U.K. Industrial West Midlands, circa 1949

In the UK the retirement syndrome was noticed prior to WW II. The Sons of Rest movement started in Birmingham, England in 1927 when a group of "industrial veterans" met at a local park. The first purpose-built building was constructed in 1930 and the movement expanded to over 3000 members in 29 parks. Sir Alfred Owen, the forward thinking president of the engineering firm of Rubery Owen in Darlaston U.K. created a Sons of Rest scheme in 1949, in which retired workers could continue to do light work alongside their former colleagues. Retirement was considered to be a social problem for men with 'nothing to do but hang about aimlessly', rather like the juvenile delinquents who were being demonised around the same time. It was therapy and it worked.⁷



In the 2007 the Australians amped up the Sons of Rest model with a new one called Men's Sheds. Aptly named because in the family home the garden shed is the place the man is seen escaping to and enjoy refuge, solace and socializing with male neighbors.

The new model worked and mushroomed into a thousand men's sheds in Australia with another thousand worldwide in places like New Zealand, the U.K., the Republic of Ireland, Canada, the U.S. and Scandinavia.

The speed of this growth suggests its meeting a pretty respectable need by men, in many places throughout the world. So why this rapid spread? What is it about Men's Sheds that is making them so popular?

First, understand that women and men socialize differently. Women find it easy to socialize face to face with each other, at such events as book clubs, crafting groups, or at organizations like the Women's Institute. Men on the other hand prefer to socialize with their own gender, side by side, either socially or more likely while working on projects. It's the way they find purpose.



NAISMITH MEN'S SHED (NMS)

MISSISSIPPI MILLS, ONTARIO

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

OUR VISION:

To create a space where men can enjoy meeting, making friends, socializing and helping each other overcome or deal with any feelings of loneliness, isolation or depression.

OUR MISSION:

To be an independent body at a physical location where men can regularly socialize, make friends, talk, share skills, network, and find companionship with the primary purpose of supporting and enhancing personal well-being and health.

To form a supportive community (the NMS) that will allow members to feel that they are not alone when faced with life challenges that seem altogether too big for one person.

To preserve skills and interests which can be passed on from one man to another.

To create a social environment through informal get-togethers (impromptu and unplanned) for members to meet in a relaxed, happy and creative space where they can feel useful, have purpose and make a worthwhile contribution to the larger community.

OUR VALUES:

The NMS is committed to providing members with an opportunity to interact within a high standard, safe and social environment where they are treated equally, with respect and encouraged to help enhance the life skills and craftsmanship of all shed members.

PARTICIPATION AND MEMBERSHIP:

The NMS welcomes participation by men living in the municipality of Mississippi Mills and surrounding regions.

All who identify as a male are welcome to join. NMS members are expected to accept and continue to uphold the values espoused above and regularly involve themselves in NMS activities.

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The Statement of Purpose of Men's Sheds explains what is delivered to men when they join. Each Shed is independently started, mostly as an autonomous entity, or in some cases under the sponsorship of an agency, following the agency's guidelines and requirements. Either way, each Shed is designed or adapted to meet the needs and interests of the men in the immediate community, following a common, universal statement of purpose.

Men's Sheds give men a safe and comfortable place where they can experience the socializing, fellowship, friendship and caring, that they once found in the work place and that is often missing in retirement.

They give men a sense of purpose and value by offering the opportunity to use their skills to contribute to their communities. Such purpose was often found in their work but in retirement men may encounter feelings of worthlessness. (Men tend to be human "doings", not human "beings").

And how do they do this? Men's Shed groups are supported by a cornerstone of friendship, kindness and caring. Providing support for each other by socializing together and caring about each other.

To quote Doug Mackie, President of Men's Sheds Canada, "Men Sheds offers a comfortable, safe place for men to gather on a regular basis, to do hands on projects of their own choosing while working shoulder to shoulder with other men. Sheds enable men to gain new acquaintances, socialize and possibly give back to their community. Thus, combating isolation, loneliness and depression and improving their own emotional well-being as well the lives of their families and the communities in

which they live."



<http://www.naismithmensshed.ca>

The Naismith Men's Shed is a good example of how successful the program is. Launched in the Spring of 2018 with a nucleus of less than a dozen guys. The Shed's membership grew as its presence became known. We now have over fifty guys on our membership role and new members continue to arrive.



The model is simple. Annual membership is \$1 a year. We meet every Thursday in the month. The first and third are breakfast meetings at a local restaurant (Guys like to eat) and the second and fourth are morning meetings held in a boardroom to address business issues, proposed projects and simply to socialize and have fun together. Added to this weekly schedule are game days for men to play board games or similar over a cup of coffee, visits to places of interest like the Purdon Orchid Conservation Area, and soon to be added, Movie Matinee Days at the Landmark Cinema in Kanata.



We raise funds from time to time by undertaking projects within the community and beyond, such as bat-houses for the Canada Wildlife Federation and accessible planters at a local retirement home. Funds generated are used to cover overheads like liability insurance.



Our shed has a flat administration. Fifty-five guys and fifty-five decision makers on any proposal. A small group of coordinators do the necessary things like secretary, treasurer, web administration, project lead and in my case, leader – for media purposes only. Shed member Nick claims that Karl Marx would be pleased to see how our administration is set up. Fifty-five members and each with their own story to tell.

To mention a few testimonials:

- quote from Forever Young B.C. magazine editorial, “Our shed creates a place where men can socialize without pressure”.
- Shed member Doug, “I discovered Men's Sheds the day after my wife was diagnosed with cancer. It has made a world of difference in how I can cope with this.”
- Shed member Al, “I wish I'd had the fellowship of a Shed 20 years ago when I was coping with my wife dying from cancer.”
- Shed member Dave, “Is this all there is? No mate, there’s plenty more with a Men’s Shed around!”
- Shed member John, “When visiting in B.C. I discovered a Men's group and discovered it provided something that was missing in my life. On returning to Ontario, determined to start such a group, there was a Men's Shed already in existence and just waiting to fill the gap of loneliness in my life.”

Footnote: “The Shed gives you a reason to get up in a morning. It keeps you mentally motivated and physically active”. If you care to visit our web site, at the address shown on the slides, you will find a wealth of information, high quality editorial and web-links to resource material which supports the Men’s Shed philosophy.



If you care to visit the Men's Shed Canada web site you will discover even more information, including a Tool Kit Document that guides you through the simple process of starting a Men's Shed.

To summarize, I have addressed the serious issue of a growing phenomenon of isolation and loneliness, in particular, among retired people and how we see Men's Sheds as being an effective tool to address it.

You have heard how rapidly the worldwide community of Men's Sheds is growing. Proving, we believe, that they offer one effective solution. It's time to stop the talk and start walking the walk about this issue, by endorsing programs like men's sheds which offer the opportunity to put wheels under something that is working.

If you have any interest in organizing a shed, or would like to acquire more information, please feel welcome to contact me through the Naismith Men's Shed web-site.

And thank you to the Council on Aging, Ottawa for inviting me to join this morning's panel to talk about a topic that is my new passion.

I'll finish with a quote from Shannon Sampert, associate professor at the University of Winnipeg, "Let's stop accepting that men lead shorter lives and actively support those who are working to create healthy spaces for men – particularly as they age. Men shouldn't have to die quicker."

