

Resident makes new connections at Oakville Newcomers Club

by **Abigail Cukier**
Special to the Beaver

When Zelda Middleton's husband started a job in Oakville in 2010, the whole family moved with him from Johannesburg, South Africa. With two children, ages seven and 10 and unable to continue working as a communications professional, Middleton, 44, had to build a new network of friends.

She joined the Oakville Newcomers Club. Part of an international network of newcomer clubs, the group runs activities for women, couples and moms with babies. Clubs include mom and tot groups, book clubs, gardening and wine. Activities include downhill skiing, golfing, hiking, quilting and restaurant outings. The club also supports charities through volunteering and fundraising. For example, its 2014 Christmas party supported the Halton Learning Foundation and the Lighthouse program for grieving children.

"The newcomer club is for any new faces to the community. You can be from Mississauga or Montreal or Paris. It doesn't really matter. The only criterion is that you are new to the area," Middleton said.

"I found it incredibly helpful to suddenly have a group of people who you had things in common with. The newness and strangeness is exactly what you have in common."

After three years in the newcomer club, members can join the Oakville Newcomers Alumni Association, of which Middleton became president last fall. Members participate in similar activities but without the focus on settling in provided in the newcomer group. There, members can also get help with immigration and obtaining health cards, driver's licence, etc.

The newcomer club has about 100 members and the alumni association has 185. Middleton says the newcomer club tends to have younger members, but includes women of all ages, including grandmothers who have moved to be closer to their grandchildren.

"It is a great opportunity to get to know new people. It allows for great exposure to different cultures. So many women have made connections and formed friendships, many who will transfer with them to alumni association."

Middleton has been involved in many activities, including the walking and running clubs and is in her fifth year of dragon boating.

"If you can get up the courage to join, there are so many ways in which you can fill your hours and get support from people in the same situation as you," Middleton said. "It is a really fun bunch of ladies. It seems people who have crossed borders know what it feels like to be new and unfamiliar so



Members of the Newcomes Club can enjoy a variety of fun activities, including dragon boating. At left, the Oakville group gets ready to go for a paddle. | submitted photos

there is a very strong and warm sense of welcoming.

"I needn't have worried that I wasn't going to make friends. So many people have become my friends and it just made the transition into Canadian life that much easier."

For information on the Oakville Newcomers Club or Oakville Newcomers Alumni Association, visit oakvillenewcomersclub.com or email info@oakvillenewcomersclub.com.

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