

Extract from the Community Halifax Herald – August 9, 2010 Edition

Make effort to keep sidewalks clear for disabled

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JACK JONES greets me at a coffee shop with a warm, open smile, the faintest hint of a Boston accent, and a youthful energy that makes me doubt his claim that he'll be 80 years old in January.

He's contacted me because there's a small problem he thinks the people of Halifax might be unaware of, and there's a simple solution that could make life better for some. But shortly after our meeting begins, I get so caught up in his charisma that I start to think that the story here may be Jack Jones himself — a man with a finger in a lot of pies, who really just can't sit back and let others do the work of building a better community.

Anyway, here's what Jones wants to tell me: one of the pies he has a finger in at the moment is the Halifax Regional Municipality's Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities. A fellow member of that committee is visually impaired, and she gets around with the help of a motorized chair and a service dog.

She recently pointed out to the committee that one of the problems she deals with in the summertime is that homeowners don't always clip their sidewalk-facing bushes. "She says it is a bigger problem than you might think," says Jones. "If you're in a motorized chair with a dog and all of a sudden you get hit in the face." Well, you can imagine how unpleasant that might be.

Jones has taken it upon himself to spread the word (that's where I come in) and hopefully create some awareness around the little things that we can do to accommodate one another.

So, consider it done. The problem had not occurred to me, but now that we know, we can all easily take steps to resolve it.

That goal accomplished, Jones and I had plenty of coffee left to chat over. I learned that he has a fascinating history as a businessman, teacher, and volunteer, and that he's currently the co-ordinator of Northwood's Telecare program, which provides free daily telephone calls to seniors who live alone in HRM.

"I've been running Telecare for 10 years," he says. "We call every day, 365 days a year. Every Monday, I do the whole list."

He says the program started about 35 years ago as a way to monitor the well-being of people who lived alone, and it has since morphed into a sort of social connection. "It's not a chat line, but it ain't like a wake-up call at Holiday Inn either," he laughs. "I give a weather report; I sing happy birthday.

"A woman said to me just this morning, 'My day starts with a little bit of sunshine when you call.' It makes me think, how can something so relatively small mean so much to somebody? It's incredible."

But I can see how a call from Jones would start your day off right. He's a charming fellow, a good talker with a lot of heart. He clearly cares about his community. And, despite the advanced age that he keeps joking about, he has energy to burn.

"I think it was Nike that had the corporate slogan 'Just do it,'" he says, with a grin. "It's so appropriate. I have a lot of fun, and I'm a very lucky guy."