

History of LIFE

In 2011 LIFE celebrated 20 years. Much has changed since then.

In 2020 we will be celebrating 30 years. How time flies!

A founder and honorary member, Fran Gruber, recalls: “Those early days were challenging and exciting, as I worked with so many committed people. I became president of the fledging organization and was able to attend conferences of other learning institutes.

We were all excited as we set up our original mandate. Both my physical and mental health were on the mend. My personal experience has allowed me to help others who were newly retired and worried what they would do for the rest of their lives....”

A new world opened for her.

You give but little when you give of your possessions. It is when you give of yourself that you truly give.

Khalil Gibran

What has changed in all these years? Everything!



Dramatic changes in technology from a paper to almost paperless environment and the impact on our volunteers, staff and members, that is still impacting us today as we continue to attempt to keep pace.

When the LIFE Computer Courses opened, members just wanted to learn to send emails to their children to show them that they were computer-literate! Consider the sophisticated courses we now offer from developing pictures from an iPhone or camera, EXCELing your own income tax, banking online, managing files and making PowerPoint presentations.

Yes, you could say that seniors have embraced technology!

Today, when you volunteer to conduct a course you can sit at your computer and Google anything you want, any time of the day or night; you can interact and engage your class online and by email. Remember “telephone trees” and snail mail?!

When LIFE started, if a class had five participants, we would run a course. Today, if we don't sign up the minute registration opens — poof, we're not in the class. Our original idea was to keep class sizes at 15, which would allow everyone to participate — today we are up to classes of 150+ with various course styles and we hustle to find a room large enough for our classes, activities and events.

During the momentous first year it was decided to have a LIFE holiday party. It was held in a member's condominium party room. Today it is called Winterfest and is held in a restaurant or catered event room. Friendships grew as learning and social gatherings were developed. Founding Board grew into an interesting and supportive group of LIFE Members and the Board has gone from an Operational Board to a Governance Board.

...and there were and still are romances! This social ingredient of LIFE has developed steadily over the years, and has made a warmth that is infectious, and unique to our program.





Today, there are so many choices

The “Blue Sky Committee” was formed and started “blue sky-ing” in August of 2009. Over three meetings, ideas abounded from which choices had to be made. They refined what would be possible within the limits of the budget. Today we have three days of Strategic Planning or “blue sky-ing” with a new name.

The LIFE Twentieth Anniversary celebrations encompassed a “Eyes of Experience” photography exhibit mounted in May 2010. Today we continue to have regular photography exhibits in the lobby of the Chang School and continue to celebrate our many accomplishments over the years.

Now, although we may have hundred and fifty plus in some classes - a problem for Ryerson/Chang School, and over 20+ courses, everyone seems happy to give an opinion!

Look at our Calendar! There are so many choices we don’t know which one to sign up for first. The Curriculum Committee, the backbone of LIFE, continued to come up with great ideas for courses, including adding courses in the spring and walks in the summer. Now we try to add courses in the summer and with over 200 plus total courses for the year, the Committee struggles with resources.

How about the role of the moderator? It has evolved. In the beginning members suggested courses, offered to take on some leadership, and we just started! Now LIFE Moderators or what we now refer to as volunteer course leaders are difficult to find, and we need a training, coaching and mentoring program for new or reluctant moderators, new instructors and even some of our experienced lecturers are requesting a program to allow them to grow and share ideas with other instructors.

We have gone from two part-time staff to two fulltime and two part-time staff in 12 months; a new non-profit governance model being implemented and expansion to other regions such as North York due to demand for our programs and courses.

These kinds of challenge are not accomplished by one person! But by the many volunteers who provided leadership, contributed time and expertise along the way, and who still do so today.

The function of leadership is to produce more leaders not more followers.
Ralph Nader.

Gift to the Chang School

At March Mingle we presented our gift to the Chang School, in appreciation of our special relationship. Member Harvey Levkoe designed a wonderful photo montage of pictures of Heaslip House in the early 40s when it was built as the head office of the O’Keefe Brewery. This was unveiled in its permanent location in Heaslip House during the Silver Screens Arts Festival. Purchased by Ryerson in the 60s, it became the home of Ryerson’s radio station, CJRT. And now it is the proud home of the Chang School of Continuing Education, the Chang 50+ Programs – and LIFE Institute.

Now bring on the next 20!