Satisfied seniors prove there's life after retirement

For these people, new challenges mean life keeps getting better.

By Michelle McColm
Freelance writer

Some people never quit. In fact, some find that as they leave their 50s, their childhood dreams come true, and they become more satisfied than ever with their lives.

Sound too good to be true? Ask Muriel Burt, 72-year-old art therapist and lecturer.

“I feel like 27,” Burt says. “I seem to feel younger every year.”

Her life has been charmed, she says. Within 10 days of moving to London in 1953, she found a job teaching elementary school. At age 40, Burt began taking university courses and graduated from UWO with a master’s degree while in her 50s.

A SECOND CHANCE

Earle Leisaka realized his teenage dream when he became ordained as a priest in the Anglican Church in December, 1987.

Leisaka, who worked in management for 22 years, began attending university part-time at 48, when he realized he’d be eligible for early retirement. After retiring six years later, he continued his studies and was put in charge of a parish part-time.

Changing careers, Leisaka says, gives retired people a second chance. “If we sit around, we can just waste away.”

Leisaka credits the support he got from his family and church in helping him make the shift.

“I LOVE PEOPLE”

Maria Stam is a 67-year-old who has “done so many things, I can’t remember them all.” Stam moved to London from Germany in 1964. After working for 8 1/2 years, Stam decided she really wanted to be a volunteer. “I love people,” she says.

Today, she’s an advocate for the elderly, especially shut-ins. In 1978, she took a course in gerontology at Brescia College and is a current member of the Ontario Gerontology Association.

She’s also concerned about the environment and is a member of the Thames Valley Region Ecological Association, which has been instrumental in pushing for London’s recycling program.

Muriel Burt of London displays one of her watercolors. Burt, an art therapist and lecturer, is 72, but says she feels like she’s 27.