

New little families are developing, minds and hearts are stretching, because of these groups. My life without theatre would be ... no life.

### Speak first

by Bob Yaremko, District 29, Lanark

Ever since I was a young boy growing up in Hamilton (where I did my first year of teaching), I have often gotten into trouble, because I said the first thing that came into my mind when someone spoke to me. For example, on my first date with my (future and still after 50 years) wife, as we were walking home on a winter's night she said that she was cold. My response was, "You're not cold, you're frigid." You can imagine how well that went over.

This problem followed me through my life: in elementary and high school, university, while teaching and as a union negotiator. Finally, in retirement it has become a positive attribute.

Since 1995 I have been a member of The Sage Age Theatre group [www.sageage.ca](http://www.sageage.ca). The theatre is Canada's first seniors' improvisational theatre group, founded in 1992 as a program to get seniors active and out of their homes. Now in its 20<sup>th</sup> year and over that time approximately 60 seniors have performed some 400 times to an accumulated audience of close to 20,000 people, mainly, but not only seniors. Sage Age is in the town of Almonte, just outside of Ottawa. We have performed from Barry's Bay to the St. Lawrence and in Peterborough. In June of 2011, we went to Halifax, N.S. and did eight shows in five days.

Some years ago, one of our members moved to Peterborough, became involved with a seniors group there and invited us to come and do a show and workshop with them. We did and it resulted some time later

in the formation of The Sage Age Players who do similar improv theatre.

Although prepared in advance, our shows are unscripted. Nothing is written down. While onstage, you only have to remember who you are, what the skit is about, and how is it supposed to end. For those of us between 70 and 85, even that can be a challenge. On top of that we are often called upon to step into a role at the last minute because someone else has been unable to attend the performance. This is where my ability to respond quickly has come to serve me well.

"Funny ... thought provoking—they made the audience laugh, cry, and think about what it means to be a senior citizen," is what has been said about Sage Age Theatre.



Bob Yaremko, far left, along with his a few fellow cast mates of the Sage Age Theatre.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BOB YAREMKO, DISTRICT 29, LANARK

No scripts, no fixed roles, just spontaneity, verve and energy. No props or sets, just seniors being themselves. No situation is too delicate to handle; from grandchildren to grieving, from internet dating, driving and seniors' abuse. All are handled with respect and in a lighthearted manner. We leave our audience laughing.

For me, it means I can use in a positive way something that has always gotten me into trouble. At the same time, I spend enjoyable time with people I like, I am active at 75, and get to make people think in a new way about being a senior in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. That's good enough for me. 