

# A safe place to learn

## LITERACY COUNCIL OFFERS VARIETY OF SERVICES

BY BRAD PRITCHARD

Bill Maes has spent a lifetime hiding a secret.

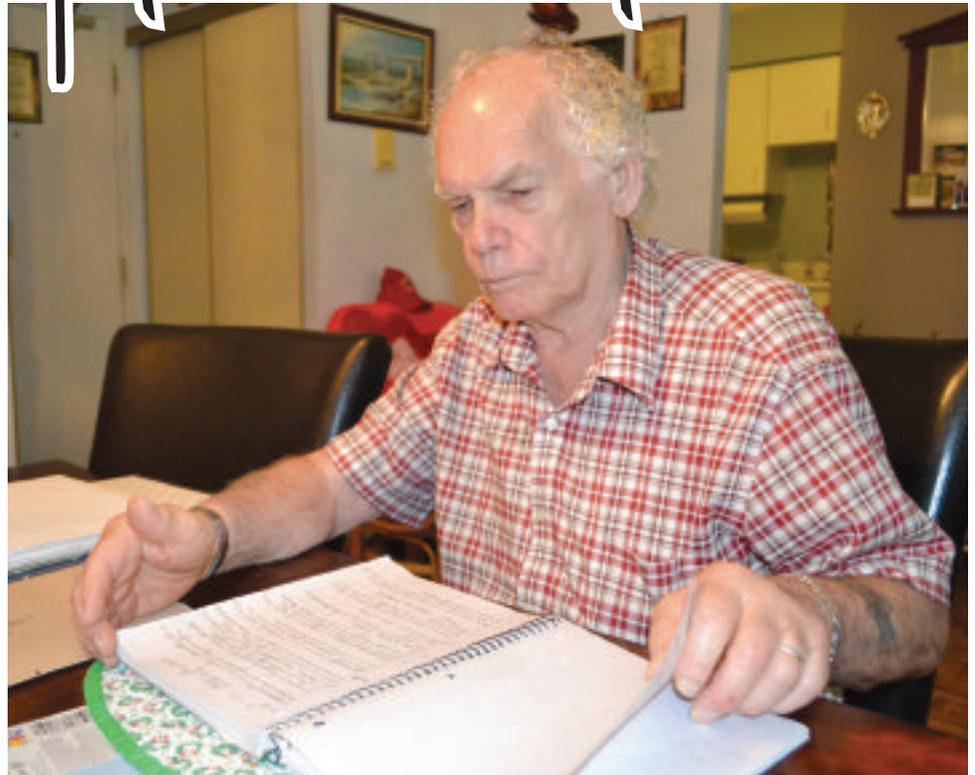
The 78-year-old Alliston man has spent the majority of his days unable to read books, peruse the newspaper to catch up on current events, or write letters to his family.

Maes grew up on a tobacco farm in a small town in southwestern Ontario, where helping his parents with the crops took priority over getting an education.

While he did attend elementary school, the experience wasn't pleasant.

"The first teacher I had was pretty mean fellow," he said. "I struggled and he would always kind of bully me."

Maes was around 12 years old when his family relocated to a farm in Alliston.



He only spent a few weeks in school before giving it up. While he could get a good grasp on some subjects like math, reading and writing never clicked for him.

A few years later, his family moved to Mansfield, and Maes just carried on helping around the farm.

When his father died suddenly, his presence on the farm became even more

“ He works really hard and he's done everything basically on his own, which is terrific.”

JOHN ROSENTHAL

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important, ruling out the possibility of ever going back to school.

Not being able to read and write limited him in many ways, but he was able to get by with help from family and friends.

On days when he had to do errands on his own, like getting a loan at the bank, he would get the teller to write down his instructions.

“It’s an awful way to live, because everybody thinks you can do it, but you can’t,” he said.

When Maes returned to Alliston about three years ago, he decided it was time to learn to read and write.

A friend told him about the Next Step Literacy Council of South Simcoe, but it took courage to overcome his apprehension of asking for help.

Inside he was greeted with a warm welcome – a far cry from his initial experience in school.

Maes was set up with a private tutor, John Rosenthal, who meets with him two hours a week.

“He works really hard and he’s done everything basically on his own, which is terrific,” Rosenthal said. “I give him some guidance and he goes home and he reads, and reads, and reads!”

Since Maes started lessons two years ago, he has mastered the alphabet, read about 40 books and has started writing about his life in journals.

## ABOUT THE LITERACY COUNCIL

The literacy council is a not-for-profit organization funded in part by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and other fundraising activities. It serves the region of New Tecumseth, Adjala-Tosoronto, Innisfil, Essa, and Bradford West Gwillimbury.

There is no charge to attend the tutoring sessions, which are available in one-to-one or small group sessions. The office is located at 16 Victoria St. E., Alliston, and is open Monday and Tuesday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Wednesday and Thursday from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.

For more information, call 705-435-5624 or visit [nextstepliteracy.ca](http://nextstepliteracy.ca).

He is also learning to use the computer so he can send emails to family and friends.

Literacy council administrator Shira Harrison McIntyre said the organization helps adults of all ages, although it’s a little unusual for someone at Maes’ stage in life to walk in the door.

“We usually see people who are still looking for employment, but it’s not unheard of for some people to hit a certain age and say ‘This is enough, I want to learn!’” she said.

When a person enters the program, she said they undergo an assessment to determine their literacy capabilities. From there, she said the person sets their own goals and how quickly they want to achieve them.

“There’s no timeline,” she said. “People can be here as long as they need to in order to accomplish their goal.”

In addition to reading and writing, the council also offers math and digital literacy tutoring, general education diploma preparation and other services.



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