

Pick up the tools to improve life

By CARL HAHN
LIFE staff

The Self Esteem Society for Central Alberta isn't just a Wallflowers Anonymous club.

While the society has been there over the last decade for people looking to turn from wallflowers to vivacious blooms, board member Wendy Collier points out it's really for anybody looking to make their lives a little better. People who are perfectly confident in their job might find they need a little help in their relationships, for example.

"There's always areas in your life that you want to work on," she says. "It fits a lot of people."

People are often too busy to stop and take stock of their own lives, and do the introspection required to know what they're happy with and what could use a little tweaking. The Self-Esteem Society gives people the opportunity and some of the know-how to do that effectively. It may not provide people with the answers, Collier says, but it does give them the tools to help them find the answers on their own.

"It gets them to see that things can be different."

Now celebrating its 10th anniversary, the society is also celebrating tremendous growth from the early days before self-esteem was an acceptable subject for discussion. But thanks to people like talk show host Oprah Winfrey, it's no longer considered shameful to admit you need a little help with self-esteem, says Collier, who has been with the society since the beginning.

Society president Cheryl Cunningham was also there at the beginning, when her dad Glenn Allen formed the society. She says he would disagree with her claim that he started it, however, and give credit to the small group of dedicated people who showed so much interest when he began bringing self-esteem speakers from the United States.

"When we started we had to pray that people would come," she says.

For several years they were pleased if they could get even four or five more people than the 11 board members, and they would usually just discuss books

Society helps people get more out of life; celebrating 10 years of service

— Please see stories on Page C2

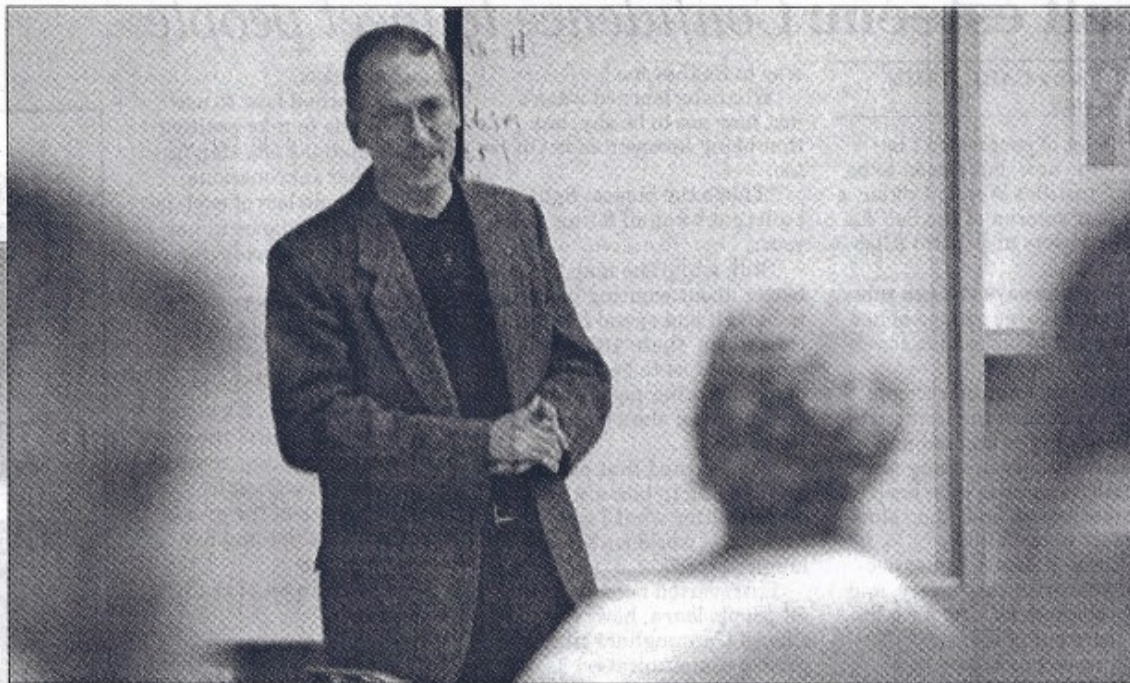


Photo by RANDY FIELDER/ Advocate staff

Murray Fuhrer addresses the regular monthly meeting: changing the parts that can be changed

or listen to tapes, with only the occasional guest speaker.

Collier says once the society started getting guest speakers every month attendance started to rise. Last year the monthly meetings were drawing anywhere from 50 to 90 people.

Initially the subjects of the meetings were more or less random, but last year the society started developing an annual theme, with various subjects coming from a single book. This year the book they're following is *The Six Pillars of Self Esteem* by Nathaniel Branden, the father of the psychological study of self-esteem.

That has helped get members out for every meeting, Collier says, and that's important for people looking to make major changes in their lives.

Although any single meeting can be the spark in somebody's life that gets him on the road to success, changing who you are to who you want to be takes a longer commitment.

"You need to change your perspective, the way

you see yourself and the way you see life," Collier says.

People often have a vague hope or wish for something to get better in their lives, Cunningham says, but buying a lottery ticket and waiting just won't do it.

"If you want your life to be better, you've got to go out and take a hold of it, and be very purposeful about what you're doing," she says. "It's not a random thing."

Attending the meetings keeps them working toward their goal, and after 10 years they're still finding benefits in the society's meetings.

"Each month the speakers give me that extra energy," Cunningham says.

"I need to go every month," Collier says. "It gets me back on track."

Annual memberships are \$25 per family; individual sessions cost \$4 for non-members and are held the first or second Wednesday of each month at Hunting Hills High School.