

# Muskoka Mosaic: Introducing Melissa Meystadt

By Paula Boon

Community is an important part of Melissa Meystadt's life – so much so that although she is only 31, this is her 20th consecutive year as a volunteer at the annual Port Sydney Turkey Dinner, which takes place this Saturday, Oct. 3.

Meystadt, who was then Melissa Irwin, started as a server at age 12. "My parents were very involved in the community, and I just learned from them," she says. In high school she took on more responsibility as a table head, and for the last six years she has been recruiting and organizing the serving crew of approximately 36 volunteers.

"There are upwards of 200 volunteers involved in the whole thing," says Meystadt. "I think it's great that it's such a big community event that's lasted so long. So many people work together to make it happen."

Since the Lions Club began holding its fundraising duck race nine years ago, Meystadt has also helped out with that event. "I'm a duck hunter," she says with a laugh. "After it's over, I got out in my canoe and hunt for ducks."

Although she now lives in Bracebridge with her husband Dennis, Meystadt is also a member of Faith Baptist Church in Huntsville. In fact, that is where they met almost four years ago.

"We're both involved in different things there. I do Sunday School and the nursery, and Dennis does lighting, sound and ushering," she says.

Meystadt grew up in Port Sydney with parents Roger and Lynda and her older brother Mark. Her main pastimes were activities at Knox United Church, helping out with the younger children at school, and Girl Guides. "I was in the Stephenson Guide unit. I just had a lot of fun," she says. "Good leaders had a lot to do with it."

Meystadt ended up getting the highest honours at all levels: her Brownie wings, all-round cord in Guides and her Canadian cord in Pathfinders.

Around age 12, music also became an important part of Meystadt's life. It was then that she started to learn to play the organ. "That's what we had at home," she explains. "I had to really want it before my par-

ents let me do it."

At age 14 she switched to piano lessons, and in high school she also played the flute.

With her teacher at the Muskoka Music Academy in Windermere, Meystadt worked through the Royal Conservatory of Music syllabus. In high school, she took on some students of her own, first theory and then some beginners in piano. The numbers kept increasing until by the time she finished high school she had two full nights of students every week.

After graduating, Meystadt continued to work for the Muskoka Music Academy, which also had locations in Huntsville and Bracebridge. Six years ago, she purchased the company from her teacher. Since then, she has completed her intermediate-level piano pedagogy (the equivalent of Grade 10) and plans to complete her final level in the near future.

When Meystadt and her husband were married in August of 2006, she moved to Bracebridge, where the music academy operates out of the bottom floor of her house. Her students range in age from three and a half to "grandma age," as Meystadt puts it.

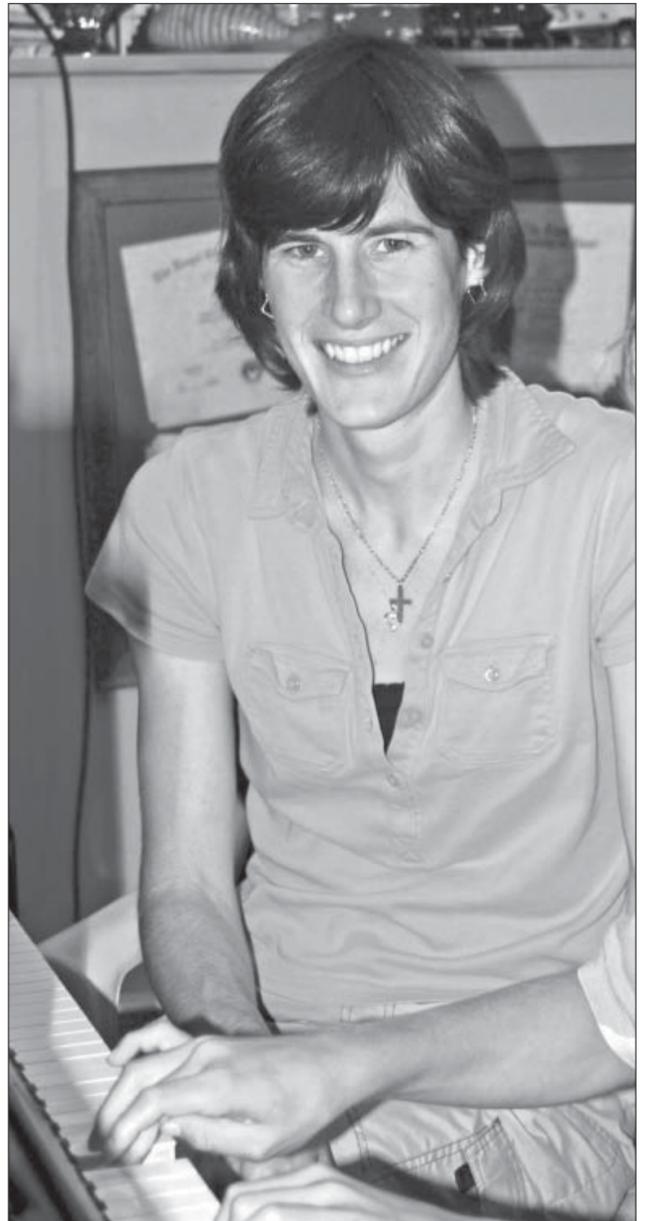
She has about seven adult students. "It's interesting with the adults because they have a different attitude," she says.

Meystadt also teaches the students of the Bracebridge Montessori School two mornings a week.

In her free time, Meystadt loves outdoor pastimes such as camping, hiking, snowshoeing, canoeing and rollerblading. Her family always paddled, and she was turned on to whitewater canoeing by her Grade 8 class trip to Palmer's Rapids and several Outers Club trips in high school. Recently, she bought her own solo canoe and is very excited about that.

And, whenever she can, Meystadt assists members of the various communities of which she is a part. "I just like helping people," she says. "I don't like being the centre of attention; I prefer to be in the background, but it's fun helping people accomplish different things."

Thanks to Cindy Burda for suggesting that Melissa Meystadt be profiled. To explore the complete collection of Muskoka Mosaic profiles, go to [www.thelifecollector.com](http://www.thelifecollector.com).



TEACHER: Melissa Meystadt, owner of the Muskoka Music Academy, sits by as a student plays his scales in her home studio. The Port Sydney native has been a volunteer for the Port Sydney Turkey Dinner for the last 20 years.

## YWCA launches Men in Business program

By Karen Longwell

In today's economic climate, many people may find themselves unemployed, laid off or just seeking a different direction for their career.

There is now a new opportunity for men looking for a change.

YWCA Muskoka will offer Men in Business for the first time this fall. The course, modelled after the organization's popular Women in Business program, is not your ordinary classroom experience, said Lynda Hutt, YWCA Muskoka employment programs co-ordinator. According to Hutt, the course is designed to support men as they consider change and navigate through transitions in their lives. These transitions may include unemployment, returning to the workforce, changing careers, being new to the community or launching a business, she said.

The seasonal nature of jobs in Muskoka may also be a factor for men looking for a change.

"You may just be really tired of the seasonal roller coaster," said Hutt.

The program is designed to increase business and life skills, expand networks and increase confidence, ultimately leading to greater economic independence.

Men from all walks of life are welcome to access the training, she said.

YWCA Muskoka has offered Women in Business, an integrated life skills and business/employment skills training program, for eight years, said Hutt.

The program, which runs for 20 weeks for up to 10 hours a week, starts in October and continues to be very popular.

"People continue to want to do the program. I think that is because the program is unique in that it provides business skills and life skills," said Hutt.

YWCA did extensive research on a program for men and discovered it is necessary and viable in Muskoka. The research came after requests from the community.

"For many years we have been asked, 'Is there anything like this (Women in Business) for men?'" said Hutt.

Funding through a private foundation made the program possible this year, said Hutt.

The program will run for three hours each week for 16 weeks. Participants will explore a wide range of topics and relate them to their own lives and experiences. Local experts and business people will contribute regularly and provide relevant, informed training for participants. They will also help participants establish contacts within their own community. Some of the program topics include: the language of personality, exploring your business idea,

market research, learning styles, communication and financial literacy.

Sessions will be held at YWCA Muskoka's classroom at 440 Ecclestone Drive, Bracebridge on Wednesday evenings, from 6 to 9 p.m., beginning Nov. 4. Registrations are currently being taken for the fall session. There is a \$35 course fee, which covers course supplies.

Forms are available online at [www.ywcamuskoka.com](http://www.ywcamuskoka.com) or in person at 440 Ecclestone Drive, Bracebridge. For more information call the YWCA at 645-9827.

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