

Ideas on the Edge

Thinking Outside— and Inside—the Box

AN APPLIED RESEARCH FACILITY AT SHERIDAN INSTITUTE LOOKS AT HOW NEW TECHNOLOGY AND IDEAS CAN ENRICH THE LIVES OF SENIORS.

Memories are precious, especially to someone suffering from Alzheimer's disease. One way to help hang onto

RESEARCH THAT MATTERS
REAL-WORLD BENEFITS FOR ONTARIANS:
• better, more creative care options for Ontario's aging population

them is to create "memory boxes" containing objects—letters, photos, souvenirs and knick-knacks—that can trigger important recollections.

And now researchers are taking the idea a step further at the Sheridan Elder Research Centre (SERC), located on the campus of the Sheridan Institute of Technology and Applied

Learning. Using computers, scanners, digital cameras and other high-tech tools, they're experimenting with the creation of virtual memory "boxes" on DVD disks. These new repositories of memory offer several advantages: they're permanent, highly portable, have a huge capacity for documents and can also contain easily accessible audio and video files as well.



The idea is just one more way the Centre is exploring ways to improve and enrich life for seniors. The focus is on applied research into psychological and social factors.

"WE RECOGNIZED A GAP IN RESEARCH FROM A PSYCHOSOCIAL PERSPECTIVE." "A lot of research into aging has been conducted within a bio-medical framework," Spadafora explains. "While that's absolutely critical, we recognized a gap in research from a



Scanners can capture even three-dimensional objects like wedding bouquets for inclusion in virtual memory boxes.



**Sheridan College
Oakville**

psychosocial perspective.”
The state-of-the-art
research facilities at
SERC, funded in part by
the Ontario Innovation
Trust, were
designed to
produce ground-
breaking new ideas

for improving the lives of seniors. There’s an internet
café where researchers are exploring ways for aging indi-
viduals to learn and use interactive technology more

The Centre now hosts an innovative day program for
Alzheimer’s patients in the Halton area, operated in part-
nership with the Victorian Order of Nurses. The program,
which brings 30 adults to the centre five days a week, is
unique in Canada, and provides a laboratory setting in
which to test new approaches to helping seniors cope
with the early stages of the disease. In particular, a
fully-equipped greenhouse and kitchen have suggested
promising new ways to deal with cognitive impairment.

When Pat Spadafora was first conducting focus
groups with seniors during the planning stages of the
Centre, she focused on one question: “If you imagine a

day in your life, what would
make that day better?” It’s a
question whose importance is
growing as the population in
Canada and the rest of the
industrialized west continues
to age. And applied research
at the Sheridan Centre is
suggesting some new and
intriguing answers—answers
that will help keep Ontario
on the cutting edge of
improving the quality of life
for seniors.



PAT SPADAFORA

effectively. A cosmetics studio is home to a project that’s
looking at the link between self-esteem and lowered levels
of stress. And a design studio will soon provide interior
and industrial designers at Sheridan—both students and
faculty—with facilities for testing room layouts, furniture
and utensils created with seniors in mind.

Alzheimer’s disease, however, remains a major focus.

Project: Sheridan Elder Research Centre
Institution: Sheridan Institute of Technology
and Applied Learning
Research Discipline: Health Sciences
Principal Investigator: Pat Spadafora
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CFI Investment: \$599,292
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**Infrastructure for Innovation
About the Ontario Innovation Trust**

The Ontario Innovation Trust was created in 1999 by the Government of Ontario to invest
in research equipment and facilities at Ontario’s universities, colleges, hospitals and other
non-profit research institutions. The Trust is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors,
according to the terms of a Trust agreement established by the Ontario government. A
small permanent staff looks after day-to-day operations.

Since its inception, the Trust has committed almost \$843 million to strengthen
Ontario’s position in the global marketplace of ideas. This represents more than a third of
the \$2.44 billion in total funding that has been invested in Trust-supported projects.