

Society gives woman chance to be grandma

by Leanna Jantzi

Gezien Brigham, to put it mildly, leads an active life.

The 60-year-old Ladner resident rollerblades, swims, line dances, shares her home with exchange students and is an avid globetrotter. But she always has time for Sean, Joel and Melissa.

The three have been part of Brigham's family for three years — since she became a volunteer grandparent.

"It's fun, I like people of all ages," Brigham says, laughing. "It keeps you young."

This week is Volunteer Grandparent Week. The Volunteer Grandparents' Society of B.C. has been around for 21 years. Currently there are about 100

matches ongoing involving about 400 people. Those matches include 52 single-parent families and 54 grandparents living alone.

The society matches grandparents after an interview and police check with families according to location, interests and compatibility.

Organizers with the society describe South Delta as an untapped market. With minimal participation, they are concentrating on Ladner and Tsawwassen with hopes of increasing involvement.

"I've always enjoyed having people around me," Brigham says. Ten-year-old Melissa is a little shy, but says she does enjoy the time she spends with her grandmother.

Brigham became a volunteer grandparent after reading a story about the society in the newspaper.

"I have a 35-year-old son and he doesn't seem to be in a rush to get married," she says with a smile. "I thought if I waited I might never have any grandkids."

The society doesn't put any demands on volunteers or force them to commit a set amount of hours. Activities and time spent together are mutually agreed upon.

With the children involved in sports and busy with school again, they visit about once a week — Melissa comes over the most. Brigham, who recently retired, takes them rollerblading and swimming whenever they all find time.



Ladner's Gezien Brigham plays a game with Melissa, one of her three "grandchildren." Photo by Trevor Rate

She points out it's much easier making plans because the children live just up the road. Organizing all her activities with her friends and grandchildren is something, she says, she finds pleasurable, not stressful.

Brigham says the whole experience has been very rewarding

and suggests it to all her friends. She sums it up simply: "I enjoy kids."

The society encourages anyone over the age of 40 who is married, widowed or single to volunteer. Applicants may or may not already have grandchildren. Call 736-8271 for more information.