

An Ideas Book Club? Yes, it is the Abbotsford Salon!

By: Julie Ireton

The Abbotsford Salon is all about starting novel conversations.

The salon is part-book club, part-discussion group and draws attendees between the ages of 60 and 92. The group meets every few months at Abbotsford House, the senior's community centre in the Glebe.

The Salon is the brainchild of Abbotsford member and Glebe resident, Pat Steenberg.

"It's a big ideas book club," explains Steenberg. "Most book clubs are about a book – a fiction – but I read a lot of non-fiction: science, neurology, politics, economics. I wanted to look substantively at different subjects. We talked it over after our Abbotsford exercise class. People said, 'why don't we do it and do it here'."

So that's just what they did.

The first Abbotsford Salon meeting was last spring. It was a brown bag lunch on a Monday afternoon. The group's first discussion was about the *brain*. Steenberg chose several different books about the memory and neurology for members to read in anticipation of the chat.



"For me it was very selfish", admits Steenberg with a laugh, "I get to share things I'm interested in and talk about them."

But other Abbotsford members, both women and men were all too happy to indulge Steenberg's interests. After all, there's a shared desire to read, discuss and debate issues.

Members of the group are former professionals, academics and public servants – people who spend time reading and talking about current affairs.

"There's no goal, no test, no conclusion," says Abbotsford member Teena Hendelman. "The idea is you don't have to read all the books, but you can come to the discussion."

So when Steenberg went on a trip for several months last year, Hendelman organized the next Salon discussion in the fall about money and retirement.

"We didn't want the salon to be a one-off," Hendelman says.

The members are definitely not shying away from controversial subjects. The group is now preparing for the Salon's winter discussion that will focus on the topics of God, humanism and atheism. The talking

points are: where did come from and why are we here, where do we go after we die and how should we treat one another?

Hendelman, Steenberg and other members of the group came up with a list of books that are now being borrowed from the library and shared.

“Canadians don’t like to talk about two subjects, money and religion, so far we’ve done both,” Hendelman laughs.

But there are still several other conversation starters the group is contemplating for future meetings.

The next Abbotsford Salon is Monday January 16th at noon. The topic is *The Gods story: Animists, Atheists, Diests and Humanists*. Bring your lunch and join in the discussion.