

# Art and Carol: Role Models for Staying Active

By: Meghan Bown, Get Fit Itasca Community Health Coordinator & Itasca County SHIP Active Living Coordinator

“Staying active sure beats the alternative,” said Art Toms when his family doctor asked him what he does to stay in such good shape. Art and Carol Toms are long term residents of the Coleraine area and great sources to connect with when you are looking for new places to be active within the community. Not only do they walk for recreation, but for transportation too. Each day, except when it is 10 below or more, they walk over to the post office to get the mail. Today they walked the Mesabi Trail to meet me for lunch in Bovey.

“The Peninsula Trail in Coleraine is probably one of our favorites,” said Carol. “It looks out over the lake and really is beautiful. The trail goes out a full mile, so it makes for a decent two mile walk that is not too hilly but offers a variety of terrain.”

Although there are many established routes in the area, the Toms enjoy exploring new routes or recalling stomping grounds from earlier days. Last fall they started off on the Mesabi Bike Path going west. Art saw a side trail and thought he knew where it went. As they continued their walk, uphill, they finally made it to the top. Looking down they realized there was nowhere to go but straight down. They think that this type of ground is the most challenging. Not knowing exactly where they were, they were not concerned with being lost. “With a lake on one side of you and the Mesabi Trail on the other, you know you are going to find your way out,” said Carol. But maneuvering back down the hill was a different story. They ended up having to slowly climb down the way they came up!

Many of the trails in the Bovey/Coleraine area are not plowed in the winter, but that does not keep the Toms from venturing out. Snowmobile traffic packs down the snow so that you can follow their path. Trout Lake usually has many snowmobile tracks to choose from. When asked what they recommend to keep yourself safe and comfortable while winter walking they advise that, “you purchase warm mittens, gloves just won’t do it, you must have choppers.” Cleats that clamp on to your boots give added traction to prevent falls. And, they always carry a cell phone just in case!

Over the years they have watched their environment change within their walking area. “There used to be a lot more places to walk,” said Art. “There are times when we will come out of the woods in one of our usual routes and there is a house there. Snowmobiles have gotten quieter; we must really pay attention to our surroundings in order to stay safe.”

In addition to walking, the Toms stay active by volunteering. Every 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday of the month they meet the retired educators at the Second Harvest Food Bank to help pack boxes. Art stated that many of these organizations lose volunteer help in the winter when many seniors travel south. They are active members of their church participating in social ministry and the quilting circle. They can occasionally be found at Community Café, serving meals and Habitat for Humanity, building homes.