

Oakridge's celebrates 20th anniversary with fashion forward outlook



By Brock Weir

This month, Oakridge Outfitters marks its 20th anniversary as a fashion destination for the women of Aurora and beyond and while it is a moment of celebration for store owner Deb Clark and her in-house stylists, the lead-up has been a moment for reflection.

In turn, this reflection, has led to a moment of rebirth.

"Oakridge Outfitters has been a part of the retail landscape of Aurora for 20 years and that is an exciting milestone!" says Ms. Clark. "Women have come to know they can always find something at this store and that remains the goal: to be the store that provides solutions for women of different ages, of different demographics and of different budgets.

"Oakridge Outfitters is an interesting name and we thought long and hard about that because while 20 years ago Oakridge Outfitters did start as a store that was more focused on sportswear and outerwear, over these years we have morphed and grown. It is lovely that women who love the store and know it is not an outfitter still just love to call it Oakridge Outfitters, but we recognize Aurora has grown a lot in these last 20 years, and particularly in more recent years. We also recognize that newcomers to Aurora who don't know Oakridge Outfitters is a full fashion store can easily be misled by that name. Outfitters suggests a sporting or even perhaps a camping kind of store and that is not who we are."

Enter: Oakridge's.

Simple, elegant, and to the point.

For Ms. Clark, the name Oakridge's honours the growth the store has seen during its early days as well as the tradition customers have come to respect, but it clearly defines them as a destination for women's fashions.

It was not a decision taken lightly. Ms. Clark says she has been "loath" to change the name because the former name has become "iconic in a local way," but it was a decision that had to be made.

"Ultimately, I came to trust that those customers who have known us over the years will completely get this decision," she says.

"They know they are going to find the same wonderful staff, they know they are going to find what they have come to look for in recent years, which is just a full fare of clothing from casuals to classics, to dressy, to day and night. Yes, I had some worry [over the rebrand] but upon careful thought I found this was the right decision for us moving forward and the right time."

Looking forward, Ms. Clark says Oakridge's identity as a business will only come to be more defined in the years ahead. Ms. Clark's vision for the business is one that is "well-connected and supportive" within its community.

To that end, Oakridge's 20th anniversary ushers in a new way of giving.

Starting this fall, Oakridge's will introduce Fashion Fundraisers, a new program which will enable non-profits within the community to book the store for no fee on a Tuesday or Wednesday evening for a mini-fashion show organized by the store.

All the non-profit will have to do is handle the refreshments and the invitations, and the Oakridge's team will do the rest and 10 per cent of all sales made that evening will be donated directly to the group.

"We think this is the best way we can really help organizations that are small, medium and large but those organizations who are looking for new and more innovative ways to put together a fundraising opportunity without a lot of heavy lifting," says Ms. Clark.

?We're here to help. We'll close the doors and they will have the beautiful store with lots of room for mingling, 2,000 square feet, a beautiful area for refreshments for their use. We will enjoy hosting them and supporting their organizations.

?I do receive a lot of requests, and I've noticed a lot of the requests I receive for a donated gift card, or a garment for a silent auction or for a door prize, tend to come to me from medium-sized not for profit organizations that are regional and local. I know from my own days in the past how much work it is to put together fundraising events. It is enormous and we're all very busy. The idea came to me, as I have honoured every request I have received, to give a donation to a cause ? but it struck me that there is a better way here. Because many of these organizations seem to have women in organizational roles with the group, it struck me that this idea might resonate well because women do love to shop. If they are going to shop for their fall clothes, their spring clothes, this is an opportunity for a local organization to say to their membership, ?Hang on, do your fall shopping at our event and when you do you will be able to benefit our organization. Let's do it together.'?

For more information on the Fashion Fundraiser program, contact store owner Deb Clark at 905-726-4063. More information will be available online in the coming weeks.