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Music and laughter will mark 60th anniversary of Canadian Federation of University Women



By Brock Weir

Women attending university a century ago were few and far between.
The movement was growing, but they found strength ? and peer to peer mentorship ? in numbers and the Canadian Federation of University Women was born.
The national organization celebrates its 100th anniversary this year and, closer to home, the Aurora-Newmarket chapter, which draws membership from across York Region and South Simcoe, is celebrating its 60th anniversary this month with a special celebration.
While the Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW) Aurora-Newmarket is marking the milestone by presenting An Evening of Art, Music & Laughter at the Aurora Cultural Centre on the evening of June 14, they are also celebrating its evolving and growing mandate within the community.
Numbering 208 members as of this year, the CFUW has marked a number of important milestones over the last 12 months. They have partnered with the Children's Aid Society for a new ?Stay in School? program benefiting young women who are wards of CAS who are going onto higher education, provided thousands of dollars worth of scholarships, and instituted new programs to encourage diligence in education across genders.
?Our group may be more active at the grassroots level than when it first started,? says CFUW member Lynn Havard. ?Yes, it was a place for women of like backgrounds to get together, but the mandate has always been to support women and girls, and their education. The basis of that hasn't changed, but the method and being out in the community has, I think, changed over the last little while.?
Adds member Dawn Horsted: ?We're not a ?university' club now. Anyone can join. It doesn't matter what education you have, it doesn't matter if you have an education; it is just a women's club and that is why it has developed into a real social atmosphere. A lot of women come for the social aspect of it. More women are becoming interested and involved in the activity part where we try to bring about social change and justice.?
The Federation is cognizant that ?every reputable global organization? ranging from the United Nations to the International Monetary Fund all recognize the education of girls as a ?major benchmark of how society will progress in societal development and stability,? says member Karen Strype, and that too is their mandate.
?We really want to emphasize that because we realise its importance,? she says.
But they also realise the importance of their own anniversary and in this milestone year they hope to not only build awareness of the Federation itself, but also build and foster what member Angie Wickham describes as ?allies? to their advocacy work.
?I think Aurora-Newmarket has been more of a social club, but we're getting out now into advocacy and we find that all the work we are doing is not out in the public and we want to do that. We chose the Art, Music & Laughter theme for our celebration because of the composition of our club: we want to bring a little laughter into the event.

?Doing that, we wanted to get out into the community, check with our corporate sponsors and also community businesses to let them know who we are and what we are doing. We do a lot of scholarships and bursaries. For example, we partner with the Children's Aid society, we work with York University and Seneca as well to give scholarships to those who are financially challenged. We want to build on that fund; we have our charitable trust, which was founded in 2016 and we're trying to increase that fund a little bit. That is what this event is all about.?

The four women who sat down with The Auroran to discuss the anniversary each discovered the club at different times, each seeking out different things and being attracted to the organization for different reasons. For some of them it was networking, for others it was sharing a laugh. Now, however, they are equally passionate about their community advocacy.

?Even though we are a woman's club and we're advocating for women and girls and their education, we also added boys as well who are wards of Children's Aid and we did that with the help of the Lions Club,? says Ms. Wickham of their social programs.

Over 50 per cent of CAS' wards, adds Ms. Horsted, are boys and that was an essential statistic in looking at how they, as a group can make a difference.

?By reaching out to the other partner organizations, we have been able to support the boys in 2018 and there were more of them that showed up than the girls,? she says. ?It is just a feel-good thing and a very good reach out to the community. It is an incentive program for young wards who need an extra push to stay in school so they could go on to higher education (university, college, or training program) because most of our work with higher education came through scholarships, but these kids weren't going to make it there if they didn't stay in school.

?Working with the child care workers and the supervisors at CAS, we came up with an incentive program where young wards who try at school will be an incentive award gift card as well as certificate and treated as if they are graduating and moving on just through their effort. It has been a really good, feel-good program and well-received by the kids as well.?

Being a member of the CFUW, they agree, is feel-good in itself. Each meeting, they said, is a learning opportunity and that's what keeps them coming back for more.

?Have fun while you're making a difference and make a difference while you're having fun and be part of the community and learn,? says Ms. Strype of the benefits of membership. ?We're not a bunch of women sitting around gossiping; there is a purpose and a focus.?

For more information on the Canadian Federation of University Women (Aurora-Newmarket), visit www.cfuwauroranewmarket.com. Tickets for An Evening of Art, Music & Laughter, which will feature pianist Emanda Richards and comedian Ken Roche, are on sale now by calling Angie at 416-846-6684 or Karen at 905-887-4277, or by emailing karenstrype@hotmail.com. Doors open June 14 at 6.30 p.m.