Late Food Pantry co-founder leaves behind lasting legacy



By Brock Weir

She saw a need in Aurora where others did not, and nearly three decades after she co-founded the Aurora Food Pantry, Lorna Rummenie leaves behind a lasting legacy of helping Aurorans.

Ms. Rummenie, who served as Director of the Aurora Food Pantry, Aurora's food bank, and steered its growth and development for over two decades, died Thursday, October 30 at the age of 72 after a long illness. She is survived by her husband, Jim and daughters Nancy-Jean and Cindy-Ann.

The Aurora Food Pantry started off life in the basement of the First Baptist Church in 1990, where Ms. Rummenie was an active member. As it expanded, it moved into larger operations at the Clocktower Building on Yonge Street just south of Wellington Street, eventually outgrowing that location and moving to Industrial Parkway South where it remains today.

Over the last three years while Ms. Rummenie battled illness, the responsibilities of the day-to-day operation of the Aurora Food Pantry were shouldered in part by her husband, Jim, and daughter Nancy-Jean.

Nancy-Jean recalls it was hard not to feel the passion her mother had for the Food Pantry and eventually she and her father became ?volun-tolds? within the organization.

?She just had a very giving personality and followed what the Bible said to love people like Jesus did and to serve others,? says Nancy-Jean. ?Her philosophy was just to help people in any way you can and to love them like Jesus would. Hopefully others will see her legacy as encouraging people to do what they can to help each other out. Helping other people in the community was very important to her.?

Through the over two decades in which Lorna served as Director of the Food Pantry, Nancy-Jean says she believes people came to really appreciate what her mother did, and the fact that she was ?non-judgemental and very patient? with the needs of each client.

?She was there every time the Food Pantry was open and when she got sick and had to have other people take over, we had to set some straight rules and guidelines for ourselves because she had done things so long her way in helping people,? says Nancy-Jean. ?People kept asking when that nice lady was going to come back to the Food Pantry because we had made some stricter rules to follow because there were so many of us trying to fill in for her.?

For Beverley Wood, co-founder of Welcoming Arms and Welcome Table, two outreach groups that evolved out of several local churches to provide food, fellowship and assistance to the less advantaged, and often worked with hand-in-hand with the Food Pantry, a fill-in will be hard to find.

?Lorna will always be a very special person in the hearts of so many people in Aurora,? says Ms. Wood. ?When she was being of assistance, she was always trying to hand up rather than just hand down. She was a person who really cared and had the courage to let her thoughts be known. Lorna wasn't afraid to speak her mind and that was one of the things I really liked about her. She was a person of character, a person of belief, a person of courage, and a person with a heart of gold.?

Her legacy, adds Ms. Wood, is the ability to recognize the needs of others at the right time, and this is a testimonial that is shared by former Aurora mayor Tim Jones, who now serves as an Ambassador for Neighbourhood Network.

Mr. Jones was out in the community on Saturday for the annual Neighbourhood Network Food Drive which benefited, among other organizations, the Aurora Food Pantry. When the Food Pantry was first founded, people weren't necessarily conscious there was a need for such a group in a seemingly affluent Town like Aurora, but through her ?personal commitment? she brought that into the fore.

?She was just a very dedicated, passionate woman,? says Mr. Jones. ?She was with the Food Pantry through thick and thin just trying to ensure there is enough food [for the community] through whatever ways and means available and being distributed to the right and correct people.?

Funeral services for Ms. Rummenie, at press time, were due to be held on Thursday morning at 10.30 a.m. at First Baptist Church on Wellington Street East at Victoria. Ahead of that, Newmarket-Aurora MP Lois Brown shared these words:

?Lorna was a highly valued member of our community whose passing is a deep loss,? she said. ?Our thoughts and prayers are with Jim and the girls at this time. Lorna always gave her all in every commitment she undertook and she has blessed many through her kind and gentle, but determined character.?

Added former MPP Frank Klees: ?Lorna has left our community a legacy of good works that has and will continue to give comfort to people when they are at their most vulnerable. Her initiative as co-founder of the Aurora Food Pantry was a practical expression of her Christian values. Her leadership and determination will be fondly remembered.?