

Aurora Historical Society revives oral history tradition



By Brock Weir

Anyone who cares to listen will know Aurora's seniors are a veritable treasure trove of local history, international perspective, and personal heroics ? but all too often these stories get lost to the ages.

The Aurora Historical Society, in conjunction with the Senior Wish Association and Hollandview Trail Retirement Community, however, are now setting out to do something about it.

The three organizations were on hand at Hillary House on Saturday afternoon to receive a significant financial boost from Newmarket-Aurora MP Lois Brown via the New Horizons for Seniors program.

Through the Government of Canada, the Aurora Historical Society received \$16,150 to launch their new project ?Let's Talk! The Oral History of Aurora.?

The new project will focus on connecting seniors with local high school students who will then be able to interview seniors about their lives, as well as their lives specifically within Aurora. Digitized, these oral histories and memories will become available to the community online as a ?digital archive that celebrates the achievements of Aurora's more senior residents.?

John McIntyre, President of the Aurora Historical Society (AHS), knows all too well the value of preserving oral traditions and heritage. As a child, he grew up in a household that included his grandmother and he revelled in her stories of Aurora's past. During that time, the AHS captured her memories on reel-to-reel tapes, as they did with other venerable citizens, but that practice had since fallen by the wayside.

?It is wonderful we have the opportunity to renew these kinds of projects and preserve those memories, whether they be people who have come to Aurora within relatively recent years, or whether they are people whose families have been here for generations,? said Mr. McIntyre. ?It is all part of our story.?

Connecting seniors and students, as well as collecting oral histories, has been a long-held dream of Ingrid Davis, who heads up the local branch of the Senior Wish Association, which provides support for seniors and helps fulfil their dreams. Making this connection has been in the works for over a year and when she approached AHS curator Catherine Richards with the idea, they saw a perfect fit.

?Our piece of the puzzle is we will be connecting with students from various high schools to try and get them to volunteer, to interview the seniors, and also do some of the background work of this project,? said Ms. Davis. ?The seniors will be provided by

Janet!?

Indeed, Ms. White, Community Relations Coordinator for Hollandview, will be something of a supplier of the raw materials for these students to work with. Through her work, she knows firsthand the riveting stories each senior in the Residence has to share.

?When Catherine approached us about participating in this project, we were overwhelmed and excited about the opportunity,? said Ms. White. ?I know right off the top we will have lots of residents who will be really excited to participate and we will have really heartwarming, interesting stories to share about their experiences growing up and living in Aurora. We look forward to it!?

In her presentation to the AHS, Ms. Brown spoke about the value such a program will bring to the seniors in this community and how it will make their ?golden years truly golden.?

Ms. Richards added they were ?thrilled? to be making this ?dormant? portfolio of the AHS active one again.

?With the New Horizons for Seniors funding, we are able to give new light and rebirth to something that hasn't really been focused on, and that is the intangible culture of Aurora, those oral histories and traditions that often go unheard of because they are not represented through objects, buildings, events and people. We are delighted to be able to initiate this.?

In the first year of the project, they aim to collect oral histories from 25 seniors, before editing them, and putting them on the internet for all to see.

?We are thrilled this is a local project that is really going to be beyond our geographical boundary.