

Aurora's Harrison recognized by Ministry for soldiers' greetings



Each year, residents of Aurora and beyond, write thousands of Christmas and Holiday cards for Canadian servicepersons stationed at home and overseas ? all with a bit of guidance from Aurora's Dianne Harrison.

It has been a labour of love for Ms. Harrison and her husband Brian for nearly two decades, picking up the baton from a friend who had a son stationed overseas. She organizes the effort each year with no fanfare, but last week they earned recognition for her work from Veterans Affairs Minister Lawrence MacAulay.

Presented at the Salvation Army's Northridge Community Church, where the Harrisons are active volunteers, by representatives from the office of MP Tony Van Bynen, the Minister said in the certificate their work was underscored by Mr. Van Bynen to his department through an article in *The Auroran*.

"I understand that you have been encouraging Canadians of all ages to send holiday cards and heartfelt messages to members of the Canadian Armed Forces for the past 16 years and that you collected an impressive amount this year, totalling more than 7,400. Your inclusion of residents of Sunnybrook's Veterans Centre in your project is much appreciated. I was particularly moved to learn how this endeavour was inspired by your affection for your former colleague and her son who was serving in Afghanistan.

"Please allow me to thank and commend you for spearheading such a tremendous labour of love to bring cheer to members of the Canadian Armed Forces and Veterans. All Canadians owe a debt of gratitude to our men and women in uniform and your efforts have helped ensure that those who serve or have served are appropriately honoured and their contributions remembered."

After receiving the letter, Ms. Harrison reiterated that the greeting card program is not something one does for recognition; it is solely to help others.

"This all goes back to Vonda and Nick," she says of the mother and son. "It's the community who has made this as successful as it is. It is the compassion that people really do care. The cards that went out last year were so compassionate. The kids just didn't write down a few words, they wrote greetings from their hearts."

For the Harrisons, there is nowhere to go but up: They have set a new goal that would top all previous years.

"My husband opened his big mouth the other day and said, 'Since we got this letter, I think the community is really going to be more aware of this now. I think our goal should be 10,000 this year.' I have told a bunch of people now and they have already started to drum up cards. I want people to look into their cupboards and find cards that are already there. I hope the Catholic School Board

gets involved ? we had two schools from the Board last year, but I hope we get more this year because the Public School Board has already been involved in this for the last four years. They have really pitched in. I would like churches to take part, too ? don't just sit in your pew on Sunday, let's reach out to the community and say, 'Hi!' to the military. If it wasn't for the military we wouldn't have a safe home or a safe country to live in.

'Wouldn't it be awesome to reach that 10,000 goal? Put that '10,000' in the paper!?

For more on how to become a part of the program, you can reach out to Brian and Dianne Harrison at bdharrison2012@gmail.com.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter