

Community celebrates 40 years of 'Hope' at Hospice gala



Four decades of bringing 'Hope' to the community was celebrated at the Royal Venetian Mansion on Thursday night at a gala celebrating the Ruby Anniversary of Hope House Hospice.

Founded in 1983 as Hospice King, which later rebranded to reflect the communities it served as 'Hospice King-Aurora' and 'Hospice King-Aurora-Richmond Hill', the Industrial Parkway South-based organization rebranded in recent years to reflect the wide-range of hopeful services they provide related to end-of-life care.

'Hope House Community Hospice has continued to provide compassionate care to our diverse, growing community,' said event co-chair Sandy Sheridan, Chair of Hope House Community Hospice, at the start of the gala, welcoming Aurora Mayor Tom Mrakas, King Mayor Steve Pellegrini, Richmond Hill Mayor David West, and Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland to the event.

Hope House CEO Heidi Bonner took the opportunity to recognize a number of community members who have worked diligently to make Hope House a success over the last four decades, and paid tribute to founders Sally Blaney, Jane Reid, and Barbara Houlding, three women who came together at King's All-Saints Anglican Church to 'develop a model for home hospice care.'

'In celebrating the history of this grassroots organization, we thank the many volunteers, whether they are providing in-home visiting, group bereavement supportive counselling, youth grieving camps, wellness for caregiver programs, fundraising and more,' said Bonner.

Added Sheridan, 'Most of all, we celebrate our amazing team, led by Heidi, who successfully pivoted many of our services and programs to virtual platforms over three particularly challenging years, preserving our team and collaborating with other community partners such as the York Region Food Network, to help reach vulnerable clients.'

'The challenges of the pandemic made us realize how important it is to promote other community partnerships to provide continued seamless, compassionate care,' she continued. 'Tonight, we thank those partners for their support and those here this evening such as Hill House, York Region's first residential hospice. Fundamentally, like many other non-profit organizations, the pandemic has required us to re-think our fundraising initiatives. Thankfully, with the highly successful 2018 Jitterbug Ball, chaired by committed past board members, and chair Leslie Hobson, Teresa van Schaik and Julie Sims, has been able to maintain quality services. Our other board members that are here today also continue to work to achieve our benchmarks in a changing healthcare environment and I thank you.'

Finally, on behalf of the Town, Mayor Mrakas gave his congratulations, stating that Hope House has a "special place in my heart."

"The work that they do to support community members with life-threatening illnesses, their family and friends, is truly admirable and inspirational," he said. "On behalf of the Town of Aurora, I want to thank the Hope House Board and staff for everything that they do. I also want to give a special acknowledgement to every single Hope House volunteer. We all know from the very beginning Hope House has relied on a dedicated team of volunteers to provide these incredible supports and services to our community, and year after year have stepped up to give Hope House their time to support residents who are often facing the most difficult times in their lives."

"We really honour community that cares and few things exemplify that more than volunteers of Hope House. Like we all know, organizations like Hope House need our support to continue to be able to provide this level of support. Tonight, as we celebrate 40 years of Hope House in our community, let's all come together and show them our gratitude by donating as much as we can to this truly one-of-a-kind organization."

"Thank you for having me here this evening. I am incredibly proud that our community is home to an organization like Hope House that is truly at the forefront of hospice care."

By Brock Weir
Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter