

Company inspires community and celebrates frontline heroes one shirt at a time

Ann Baiden had never imagined that her 20th year of being in business would be in the midst of a pandemic. As CEO and founder of Innovatex Solutions, a company specializing in promotional products, Baiden brainstormed ways to give back to the community even as many of her clients closed shop in the early days of the pandemic.

"We worked to design and produce shirts with both inspirational and essential messages. We committed to donating a minimum of \$2,500 to the Southlake Foundation COVID-19 Fund but our goal is to sell out of our inventoried shirts and exceed the amount," said Baiden, whose team came together to plan the fundraiser. "Susie Goobie, Client Experience Creator and Sales Relationship Manager for Innovatex, spearheads our Trees of Hope butterfly keychain fundraiser in conjunction with the Healing Gardens at Southlake and she is the one who suggested the Foundation's COVID-19 Fund in support of front line workers."

The mother-of-two realized that her company specialized in something that could be put to good use to spread the message of hope and support.

"As promotional product distributors, we are aware of the recognition our products can garner with the correct messaging. We felt these shirts would be like walking billboards that could bring our community together. Inspired by the front line workers at Southlake Regional Health Centre, Innovatex began selling t-shirts and hoodies, designed with phrases like, 'Together We Got This', 'Apart But Together', 'If you can read this you are closer than 2 metres', and a tribute shirt to nurses and doctors reading: 'Commitment, Sacrifice & Courage.'"

Baiden and her husband were both born at Southlake Regional Health Centre, then known as York County Hospital. Like many other parents, Baiden began working from home while juggling homeschooling when the closures were announced in March. "With many of our factories closed, it was challenging to do business in the early days of COVID-19, but we managed to service our clients and maintain our business standards of prompt and detailed service and delivery," said the mother of two. "We are very fortunate at Innovatex to have an incredible team that works together and supports each other. We hosted regular zoom meetings and added fitness challenges to keep us motivated and engaged."

The support for her company's fundraiser kept her going, too. "The community has been incredibly supportive and we love receiving their notes and photos," said Baiden, who learned to drive the bobcat to ship some skids. "You do what you have to do to ensure it all gets done, right?"

From seeing photos of entire families wearing their t-shirts to having their story shared on Breakfast Television, Baiden's fundraiser has received incredible support. "We have sent shirts from coast to coast across Canada and received photos and notes from front line workers saying how much they love their shirts. Another favourite is a note from a parent who said their teenager wouldn't stop wearing it, it was his new favourite shirt."

Stephen Ralls, a local customer who ordered the t-shirts, was impressed with their efficiency. He wrote to them in an email, "Having worked in technologies and sales, I have never seen a faster delivery from an online order in my life. I ordered, had dinner, went into town for some supplies and the shirts were here when I got home. Thank you for getting behind Southlake with this fundraiser, I have family that work there, it means so much to me. I can't say enough about your support."

The pandemic may be far from over but as Baiden pointed out, "we used this time to better ourselves."

To support the fundraiser and order t-shirts, visit www.innovatex.ca/fundraiser

By Kinjal Dagli Shah