

New homeowners could help the hungry when they move into the 2C development



By Brock Weir

Summer is usually a slow time of year for the Aurora Food Pantry.

People are often at the cottage soaking up the sun, away on vacation, or gearing up for the busy fall ahead. While Thanksgiving and Christmas are usually times of plenty, this season presents a particular challenge for them. This month, however, they got a welcome infusion of \$2,000 to their group, courtesy of Opus Homes, and the contributions of local photographer Anna Lozyk Romeo.

As Opus, one of a number of builders joining forces in the new Aurora Trails community, was preparing their showroom for an onslaught of new customers, they were looking at ways to give prospective homeowners a true flavour of the community they were thinking about joining.

After a chance meeting, they met Anna, who spearheads the Living in Aurora blog, which documents the goings on in Aurora through photography.

“While we were starting to do some research on building in Aurora, we made contact with Anna,” explains Opus president Andrea DeGasperi-Ronco. “When we read her blog, we saw what a cornerstone to Aurora she really is. [Her work] represents to people who do not live in Aurora what Aurora is and stands for.”

Brainstorming ways to incorporate Anna's photos into the work they were doing, they settled upon a series of photos that line the walls, as well as a video combining the shots with original music by local musician Glenn Marais. Their collective vision was to give a sampling of what “living in Aurora” is all about, from local concerts, to area facilities, streetscapes, and just residents at large. It provides residents, says Ms. DeGasperi-Ronco, “an insight into what it is to live in Aurora.”

“This woman is spectacular,” she says of Anna. “We are a little company that tries to give back and she is a self-made woman who wants to give back to the community she lives in.”

When they came to a matter of settling the fee, Ms. DeGasperi-Ronco says she was “blown away” when Anna asked they cut a cheque for the Food Pantry instead. After agreeing to a cheque for \$1,500, Opus upped the ante by a further \$500.

“This ensures we are able to buy the milk and the fresh meat and eggs that we buy every week,” says Nancy Jean Rummenie of the Aurora Food Pantry. “It is good to have a good cushion and run a food bank without worrying about having to meet rent and those

things. We buy a lot of the stuff we don't get donated and we can get a good stock when we get good financial donations.

?Our donations are really down in the summertime. Concerts in the Park do a little bit, but other than that, there is not a lot of big food drives, so we really do see a lack of donations and we buy a lot during the summer. Around Thanksgiving and Christmas, everyone is in the giving mood.?

The Aurora Food Pantry can expect additional help in the years ahead from this particular developer.

When Andrea started the company with her husband four years ago, they looked for ways they could give back to the communities in which they built. A lot of people have ?negative feelings about buying from a big builder? but they set out to establish more of a ?family and personalized approach? to home building.

While some builders give new homeowners some token as a ?thank you? when they move in, Opus provides them with a pizza voucher to take the worry out of feeding the family on moving day and, once they are all settled, new homeowners are then presented with a list of local organizations to which the builder will donate in their honour.

?It has been well received by our purchasers and it makes us feel like we are donating back to the communities we are building in,? she says.

For Anna, it is a winning combination.

?Aurora seems, for many, a bedroom community and for many years we didn't work in Aurora,? says Ms. Lozyk Romeo. ?We didn't know Town Park, we didn't know the Aurora Cultural Centre, and all that stuff. I think it is a great idea to give an imprint [of the community] when people come in and first look. They might not do it right away, but they may have [these photos] in the backs of their minds. It opens up a way to explore Aurora.?