

Salvation Army has thousands of reasons to "smile" thanks to Tim Hortons



By Brock Weir

If you happened to pick up a 'smile' cookie at a local Tim Hortons earlier this year, your sweet contribution will help put smiles on the faces of countless people once the Central York Salvation Army's new headquarters is complete in Aurora.

Representatives from Aurora and Newmarket Tim Hortons locations were on hand to present Majors Brian and Glenda Bishop of the Salvation Army's Northridge Community Church with a cheque for nearly \$28,000 from their Smile Cookie Drive.

This money will go towards the completion of the Tim Hortons Community Kitchen, which will be a showplace serving Tim Hortons coffee to countless clients coming through the doors of Northridge, which serves the communities of Aurora, King, Newmarket, Whitchurch-Stouffville, and East Gwillimbury, in the years ahead.

Now under construction on Leslie Street near the northwest corner of Wellington Street East, the first phase of the expansive community facility, which is set to include a worship space doubling as a community auditorium, full-sized gymnasium, and multi-use space in addition to Tim's Kitchen, being a part of Northridge will leave something of a legacy, according to Tim Hortons owner Jim Alexander.

'Brian went to various businesses and one of them was ours,' said Mr. Alexander. 'He showed us the plan and I thought it was just a great fit because what they're building is the kind of thing we were looking for. When we try to give back to the community ? and yes, we do hockey teams and things like that ? but this is bricks and mortar. Tim Hortons is coffee, they were building a kitchen, they needed sponsorship, and it just sounded right.

'We used our smile cookie program, which is our annual program to raise money, [for this] so it is really community money as much as it is ours. 100 per cent of it went to this project.'

Casting his eyes over concrete foundations and walls now in place and workers spilling sparks on the ground below working on metal roof beams far above, Mr. Alexander added: 'My view is putting dollars where they will last because this is going to be here longer than we are. Advertising and sponsoring an event comes and goes, but this is more of a legacy project.'

The sponsorship was certainly welcome to Northridge, as they are beginning to see some fruit from the long labour it took to get the construction of the long-awaited community hub off the ground.

'The Salvation Army is all about community, whether or not it is our faith community or the people we serve in the community,' said Bishop. 'It is all about supporting one another and caring for one another, so it was a really good fit to have Salvation Army and

Tim Hortons work in cooperation and partnership. We are just so thankful.

“Even though our geography has landed here in Aurora, we will continue to serve Newmarket, East Gwillimbury, King Township and Whitchurch-Stouffville. It is a pretty broad area and the fact we are on a main arterial road is an advantage, right off the 404 and this, as we have seen to the north of us, is just building crazily. We believe we will be able to be more accessible to people in this location as well.”

More accessibility will be needed as more people from all walks of life continue to avail themselves of Salvation Army Services. As communities like Aurora, King and Newmarket grow, they have seen an “incredible” spike in the need for counselling programs, as well as programs for recovery, anger management, grief support, and emotional needs, “whether it is clinical or circumstantial” and mental illness, said Bishop.

“We are seeing, even with regards to what Tim Hortons is providing, it is going to be a great avenue for people to come in and have a cup of coffee and just have some comforts to be able to enter into some of those areas in their lives that are really, really difficult for them to talk about,” said Bishop.

The Salvation Army aims to have Phase One of their Northridge Project open by this coming June. They hope to have the roof and walls enclosed before the snow really starts to fly. And, if everything goes according to plan, mark your calendars for the weekend of September 23, for a community party to celebrate the building's grand opening.