

Adopt a senior this Christmas ? or a whole lot more ? through Senior Wish



By Brock Weir

Christmas Morning can be a very exciting time for some residents of Chartwell Aurora. For others, however, it can be a very sad, lonely day.

Rachel Smith, Director of Social Work at Chartwell Aurora (formerly Resthaven), has seen this unfold all too often. Many residents have the luxury of having family and friends nearby who can take them out for turkey, or dine in-house, but others aren't so lucky.

“What we have been finding over the last couple of years is a lot of our residents don't have families and they don't have any visitors,” says Ms. Smith. “For that day, it is a sad day, so that is why we, as staff, decided to spice it up a little bit and dip into our own pockets just to provide even something for them to open on Christmas Day and have a special moment. It can be a tough day.”

Adds Chartwell Business Manager Christina Presta: “It is the least we can do. The residents do become your family. We see them more than we see our own families, so you don't give it a second thought. You do what you can for them.”

But, for the second year running, the York Region branch of the Senior Wish Association is partnering with Chartwell to make this day extra-special for as many residents as they can.

Led locally by Aurora resident Ingrid Davis, the local chapter first got their feet wet with Chartwell last year. Lessons learned, and a game plan streamlined, so it is full speed ahead seeking donations from the community through December 18 and, more importantly, looking for those special people and businesses within the Aurora community to take on adopting an individual senior and making their small wish come true. Better yet, they can go all-out and adopt an entire floor.

“I am hoping corporations and businesses in Aurora will want to adopt a floor, which would be very exciting,” says Ms. Davis. “If they just want to adopt two people, that's great, and they can give me a call and I will assign them a senior and that will just make their Christmas Day awesome. We want to make it easier for Santa to hand out gifts on Christmas morning.”

Adds Ms. Smith: “We got our feet wet last year and learned a lot. Now we're ready for the second year.”

Adopting a senior and buying them a gift for Christmas is not as daunting a task as it might sound. According to Ms. Smith, topping the lists are the smallest of things like a pair of slippers, a large print crossword puzzle book, a nifty little scarf, or a tube of eye-catching red lipstick.

?Sometimes it is the simplest items,? she says. ?Some residents want something like a corkboard so they can display all their pictures in their room. One lady on our list asked for a box of Pot of Gold chocolates and that is all she wanted. That is a great Christmas treat! We would love to offer them so much more, but they only ask for the very simple things.

?We had one resident in particular where the Association had donated a wall hanging about love and that was her gift. She opened it up, burst into tears that someone loved her, that someone had thought enough of her to give her this wall hanging, and it is still up in this room.?

These are the experiences that drive Ms. Davis in her work with the Association's York Region Chapter. Throughout her time with the group, she has spearheaded initiatives connecting local students with seniors, facilitated a partnership between the Aurora Historical Society (AHS), the Association, and the Hollandview Trail Retirement Community to make the AHS' recent oral history project a reality, and is now taking the Association's involvement within Aurora to the next level.

?For me, it is very humbling,? she says. ?It is seeing the ball rolling and getting bigger and bigger every year. That is really exciting to me. I don't actually see the residents receiving the gifts, but it is just such a wonderful feeling that you can give and just bring joy to people you don't even know.?

But the women at Chartwell do know, and can tell you first hand.

?A lot of times at Christmas, the focus is on the younger generation, the kids, and what they are going to get the next day from Santa,? says Christina. ?As you get older, and even teenagers now who are in need aren't getting what they need, and seniors are often forgotten. The fact there is this partnership in long-term care homes and this service that brings the community together and brings awareness to the fact it doesn't matter how old you are, you want to celebrate Christmas and have something to look forward to at the holidays.?

If you, your community group or business are interested in contributing to the Senior Wish Association, or in adopting a senior or floor, contact Ingrid Davis at 905-717-0135.