

Aurora couple plans to take P.E.I. by foot in bid to help local food insecurity



An Aurora couple that has set marathon records and taken on challenges that have taken them on foot from Toronto's waterfront to the City of Barrie have set themselves a new challenge: circling Prince Edward Island to raise money for food banks here at home, and in the maritime province.

Erlinda and George Biondic, 85 and 73 respectively, plan to walk 700 km around Prince Edward Island between June 20 and July 23, camping along the way.

?A couple of months ago we were told the shelves were almost empty,? say the couple on what inspired them to plan the trek. ?Although we live in an affluent society ? at one time Aurora had the highest per capita income in Canada ? there are people who have fallen on hard times through no fault of their own. COVID forced many to tighten their financial belts to the point where they faced food insecurity. Could have been your neighbour, silent out of embarrassment. Without food, a child can't learn and develop; an adult can't work and be productive, and when pressed to survive, some will turn to crime. Can the rest of us sit idly and do nothing?

?Also, young and old need to be more active ? not just for physical and mental health. Anxiety and depression are on the rise, and now, the impact of tariffs will be additional burdens, forcing folks to choose between paying for a roof over their head or food. The need will be greater, so to meet the challenge, Erlinda on her 85th birthday said, ?Let's go big this time. No wimping out. We'll never regret doing good.'?

Speaking to George as the couple put the finishing touches on their route and gathering their gear, he said the food pantries both here at home and in Charlottetown were ?thrilled? with their out-of-the-box idea to support their organizations and spoke of what keeps them motivated.

?I guess we're not ready to accept that we're done,? said George with a chuckle. ?Birthdays remind you that you're getting another year older, and certainly once you get to 60, 70, and 80, things get tougher, but we're not ready to accept that we're done; we feel we can contribute to society. That's a big priority for us ? and not just raising awareness as far as food needs, but people may see us and say, ?Oh, if they can do these things at their age, why can't I?' We feel that we're kind of examples to other people that life is not over once you retire. It doesn't have to be walking, necessarily ? but be active, gardening, whatever ? do something with your life so

that when you wake up every morning you're excited about the day.

?The other side of the demographic is younger people. We feel that younger people are not engaged as much as perhaps they should be in terms of activity. I know there are a lot of distractions with digital devices, and for all of us, that's very tempting, but the younger kids need to be out there.

?It's good for them physically and it's good for them emotionally. In fact, it's good for all of us to be active.?

At the end of the day, however, as important as staying active is, this time it's all about helping others.

?When we help others, it actually boosts our own mental wellbeing,? said George. ?I've said this many times, but I've never regretted doing something good for somebody else. That's what we feel, that's what drives us, and we feel we are going to make a difference ? and maybe it will start a trend where more people are going to give rather than, say, take.

?Aurora has been our home for several decades. We want to make sure that we can help everybody in our Town to feel safe, feel comfortable when they're walking around. When we moved up here from Toronto, Toronto was a little bit rough, but we want to keep Aurora just the way it is in terms of a community where you feel good about it and the people that you encounter, you feel good about them.?

To help support George and Erlinda Bionic's efforts, you can do so online.

To benefit the Aurora Food Pantry, visit aurorafoodpantry.ca, and select ?Donate? in the top right corner of the page. The next page will display a dropdown menu under ?Fund? and all you need to do is select ?George and Erlinda's PEI Fundraising Walk.?

Supporting the Charlottetown Food Bank and Charlottetown Soup Kitchen is easy as well. Simply visit www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/food-bank-and-soup-kitchen and select ?George and Erlinda's Island Walk? from the dropdown menu.

By Brock Weir