

Aurora Food Pantry looks to next 25 years as more than just a food bank



By Brock Weir

The late Lorna Rummenie served the Aurora Food Pantry with distinction almost since its inception in a church basement.

From those early days, it has evolved into a vital community resource, helping to feed those in need, and those just looking for a helping hand to make ends meet.

Ms. Rummenie's work and legacy was honoured by the Food Pantry last week as they dedicated a bench in Town Park in her honour.

The presentation to her widower, Jim, and daughter Nancy-Jean, took place at a ceremony held to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the local food bank, and the volunteers that keep it running and families fed. Presiding over the festivities was Aundrea Laroque, the Food Pantry's newly minted executive director, and Ms. Rummenie's successor.

The long-time Aurora resident was immediately struck by how well the organization has thrived purely driven by volunteers. It is a testament, she says, to their commitment. This commitment extends to taking her on almost as their first full-time staff person to help lead the organization for the next quarter century.

"Ideally we would like to be out of business in 25 years, but that is the prize in the sky," she says. "The reality is larger government bodies aren't addressing the issue of poverty and more people are struggling and more middle class people are struggling. Until that time when people are making a decent minimum wage and the cost of living is a standard, I think that food banks will always be in the picture."

In this day and age, however, food banks need to do more than just hand out food to those in need. It is important, she says, to expand services into offering skills and other services to teach clients how they can stretch their dollar.

"Our mandate is to be an emergency food supply organization, but in a responsible way we need to ensure government — municipal, provincial and federal — are also addressing the issues of why people use food banks and what we serve here, being more broadminded of what's healthy and not necessarily giving people food we might not eat ourselves," she says.

"One of the things I am doing right now is gathering feedback from clients and volunteers about what works well at the food bank, what they would like to see more of, and maybe what we're not doing. We will share that information with the public, connect with other organizations in the community that provide similar programs so they are also informed on what resources are available,

connecting them with skills training and education about meal planning, how to stretch a dollar, how to do couponing and those things that further relieve the burden they feel when they have to choose between rent and groceries.?