

Aurora Nursery finds new home after United Church fire



By Brock Weir

Last April, Melissa Giannotti and Kim Galluccio were looking after 13 kids one Friday morning at the Aurora Nursery School. It was a typical day in the nearly 40-year-old YMCA daycare program until shortly after 10 a.m., when it became a day to remember.

Workers came down into their basement home at Aurora United Church and quietly told them the roof was on fire and to evacuate the building before the fire alarms started to go off, and they did so quickly, quietly and calmly.

"We didn't tell the kids it was a fire," says Kim. "We just told them it was a fire drill and they knew what to do. The older ones held hands with some of the younger ones and we walked across the parking lot to T.C. Burgers."

After getting a hold of each child's parent or guardian, the last one was picked up by 11.15 a.m., but the two carers were not allowed to leave the area until well after 2 p.m., by which time the fire was an inferno and the daycare centre, as it was, consigned to memory.

It was the start of a long journey as the YMCA helped organize overflow space to accommodate the programs at St. Jerome Catholic School, but this journey came to an end on Friday with the grand re-opening of the nursery program at Trinity Anglican Church.

"We have hosted a lot of grand opening events at the YMCA, especially with childcare offerings, but this is the first grand re-opening that we have ever attended," said Linda Cottes, Vice President of YMCA Child Care. "The Monday [following the fire], the Aurora YMCA St. Jerome Daycare worked closely with the team to have the doors open once again with the children and staff for seamless program delivery. We then met with Trinity who graciously agreed to take us in with open arms and welcomed us in the wonderful community they have built here."

Opening informally in September, they chose the Friday before the Family Day weekend to gather families who were impacted by the fire for a morning of celebration.

"Thank you to everyone who helped the Aurora Nursery School program turn an unfortunate situation into a new opportunity," said Nadine Star of YMCA. "I particularly wish to thank Melissa and Kim who calmly moved the children out of harm's way - heroes in my eyes."