

Beverley Wood named Aurora's Citizen of the Year



By Brock Weir

She has lived her life in view that it is "amazing what one can learn when one opens up one's ears", but the sound might have been deafening for Beverley Wood on Monday night when she was named Aurora's Citizen of the Year.

Ms. Wood received her recognition from Mayor Geoffrey Dawe and Council on Monday night at the Community Recognition Awards, held at the Aurora Seniors' Centre.

She succeeds Auroran founder and former councillor Ron Wallace to the post.

A founder of Welcoming Arms, the outreach group bringing together Trinity Anglican Church, Aurora United Church, Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church, and Community Campus Church, Ms. Wood was celebrated for her tireless community service stretching back nearly 40 years.

Ms. Wood moved to Aurora in 1976. Two years later, she and a group of 13 other members of Trinity Anglican Church made a very real impact on the community, sponsoring a family of Vietnamese Boat People and helping the refugees plant new roots in Aurora.

And plant them they did. The family has flourished, going into both the public and private sectors and maintaining very close ties with their Trinity sponsors.

In the time that this family has flourished, so too has Aurora and, in turn, the work of Beverley Wood. She has seen the town grow and develop on many facets. Some of this growth has been good, some has not been as positive, but as the community has grown, so too have the needs of each resident.

Founded in the fall of 2006, the Welcome Table, followed by Welcoming Arms, was founded to meet the needs of low-income families in Aurora who had often sought assistance from their respective churches to make ends meet in lean times.

Typically, the people in need were unemployed or on government assistance programs and Welcoming Arms rose to the challenge to address that particular community gap.

Indeed, providing a "caring, listening ear" is part of their mandate, equal to providing gift cards, food vouchers, cleaning supplies and toiletries to clients, all the while facilitating their connection to other groups that might be able to lend a hand or an ear.

"I think there is a need for people to share that which they would want to share," Ms. Wood told The Auroran in 2012 after receiving her Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal from Newmarket-Aurora MP Lois Brown. "It could be something that is very exciting or it could be someone who is hurting, and I think through our church we have been encouraged to do that.

"We are here to be of assistance to those people in need and it could just be that they need to come in and have a good chat. You have the very positive and you have some that is not quite so positive and I feel very comfortable listening to people. With Welcoming Arms, that is one of the mandates " that we listen and it is amazing what one can learn when one opens up one's ears. We have learned so much."