

BROCK'S BANTER: Pink cowboy hats and boots aside...

By Brock Weir

I have said it before, and I have no hesitation in saying it again ? the best thing about this job is uncovering the good and interesting things people do in this community.

It doesn't matter if people are singing their praises from the rooftops. It doesn't matter if they prefer to work in a quiet corner, behind closed doors, or even covertly on the things that they are passionate about in case they might be seen as trying to draw attention to themselves, or, God forbid, let in any daylight onto the magic.

It was a thought that occurred to me while speaking to Dr. G.W. Williams student Sydney Cobbold last week. After recently receiving a double-whammy of recognition from the York Region District School Board and Magna for the Community/Neighbourhood Network, for her outstanding contributions to both her school community and Aurora as a whole, she told me she didn't really realise the impact she had until very recently

I had the opportunity last week to interview Reverends Dawn Davis and Ian Martin of Trinity Anglican Church, alongside Reverends Andy Comar and Lorraine Newton-Comar of Aurora United Church, to discuss future plans as their distinct congregations forge a new path together.

Lorraine expressed her surprise that the media seemed to be flummoxed at how quickly the two congregations came together to help one another in the aftermath of the April fire at Aurora United Church.

?It is just what we do,? said Ian, recounting his response to the collective degree of surprise, with a measured degree of surprise thrown back in the direction of the person asking the question.

Perhaps the surprise was genuine for outlets who don't work every day in Aurora, but not for those of us close to home.

While I admit my own degree of surprise was in the speed in which these two communities came together, Aurora ought to know that our ecumenical community, regardless of your personal religious affiliation, or lack thereof, does not shy away from walking the walk.

Case in point, the people that descended on Trinity less than 24 hours after the fire to get a good hot breakfast and commune in the spirit of both love and loss in the form of the traditional Rise & Shine Breakfast, hosted by Welcome Table.

It was a testament to the very best in our community, and I can think of no better person to be Aurora's 2014 Citizen of the Year than Beverley Wood.

Beverley is a founder, and active volunteer with Welcoming Arms, the joint effort of Trinity Anglican Church, Aurora United Church, Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church and, most recently, Community Campus Church to provide outreach to people in distress throughout the entire community.

If you have lived in Aurora for any length of time, you are likely familiar with face, if not the name, of Beverley Wood. The lady is everywhere. I encountered her in many different capacities since I started work at The Auroran back in 2009. Each time I was struck by the energy, vitality, and enthusiasm in which she tackled anything that came her way.

Since those early days, the first opportunity I really had to sit down and speak to her formally was back in late 2012 when she and Trinity parishioner Annabelle Black (Aurora's second-ever Citizen of the Year, back in 1972 for those keeping score) were preparing to welcome members of the Ly family back to Aurora.

In 1978, they were two of 13 parishioners from the Church who sent a convoy of three vans down to Pearson International Airport to pick up the family, Vietnamese Boat People, as their sponsors.

Although Beverley was unable to attend the reunion at Moon Garden, she made it clear she was there in spirit.

Decades later, this group remains as tight as ever, celebrating one another's successes, lending support where they are needed, and many of them still have firm roots in York Region, even serving as valued members of the York Regional Police.

My second formal encounter was in 2012 when she received her Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal for her work from Newmarket-Aurora MP Lois Brown at the York Regional Offices. But, it is the third which sticks out most in my mind.

It was 2013, and a steady stream of people filed into the Rectory behind Trinity. They introduced themselves to the volunteers buzzing around the building, took their seats in the hallway, and these volunteers went from person to person making sure everyone was well taken care of.

Some came in dire financial straits, some seeking advice, some for grocery vouchers to provide food for their children, and others simply looking for toiletries so they could make a good impression on a vitally important job interview.

This was a typical Thursday in the life of Welcoming Arms and it was clear to see that this was where Beverley was most at home,

not seeking attention, but doing what she and the rest of the volunteers simply believe is right.

As I watched her receive her award on Monday night, I wondered what category she would fall in. She is evidently aware of the impact she and her fellow volunteers have had on individuals, yet she is not one to shout it from the rooftops.

Unless she is wearing her vivid pink cowgirl outfit promoting Welcoming Arms, and trying to move raffle tickets ? which has become something of a trademark since Welcoming Arms was selected as a community partner in Magna's annual Wild West Hoedown ? she does not try to draw attention to herself or the work she does. She is, however, eager to share when asked.

The pride she shares in this community is evident to everyone she meets and now, as she begins her reign as Aurora's Citizen of the Year 2014, let's use the opportunity to reflect this pride onto her.