

Christmas keeps on giving for community groups with Oakridge's Fashions and customers



Christmas had a brief revival just before Family Day as local business owner Deb Clark took on the role of Santa, delivering some late-breaking gifts to three community groups.

On Friday, Clark, owner of Oakridge's Fashions, located on Yonge Street just south of Wellington, began distributing more than \$10,000 raised by the store in the holiday season through their first Oakridge's Giving Shop and their Holiday Giving program. The initiative featured an array of products for both women and men with portions of the proceeds divided between the Aurora Food Pantry, Marquee Theatrical Productions, and Belinda's Place, a shelter for women in Newmarket.

Products in the giving shop included select garments, farmers' market bags, candles, preserves as well as the sale of holiday mice tree ornaments and a children's book, penned by Clark, tied into the festive felted rodents.

"This is a community of people who are really interested in supporting community," said Clark last week. "Some came from a distance specifically to do some Christmas shopping in our store, all because they told us they heard about the community giving program and they wanted to know what it was all about. As a resident and a business owner, it made me really, really happy to see so many people interested in participating in a giving program that would support some very key organizations in our Town."

The Aurora Food Pantry has been a beneficiary of their mouse tree ornament initiative since its inception in 2021, with Belinda's Place and Marquee coming on for the first time this year.

"I know the Food Pantry was happy to see this proceed again and were especially delighted to have the addition of the children's book in the campaign," said Clark. "They helped promote it themselves and a number of folks associated with the Food Pantry made their way into the store and purchased ornaments and books."

"Being a business that has its focus on women, I wanted to give a gift to an organization that is serving women and Belinda's Place is doing just that. I am thrilled to have a first-time association with Belinda's Place through Oakridge's Fashions and we hope it will help them deliver their services to women who have such an important and immediate need."

"Marquee is a wonderful, wonderful cultural not-for-profit organization [in the York Region area] and I love that they focus on not just performances for children, but performances that involve adults and also other aspects of the theatre. It serves as an organization that not only delivers great performances for us to enjoy but also has an educational component for people who want to learn more about live performing arts in the theatre context and that is a gift for our community to benefit from." Adds Marquee founder Sheryl Thomas: "We are so thrilled to receive this donation from Deb and Oakridge's Fashions and our plan is to use the funds

towards building materials to complete a new classroom.?

In looking at organizations to benefit from the holiday giving program, Clark says she is ?always about access when it comes to people who want to become involved, who need a service, who need help,? and all three groups fit the bill.

The success of the 2022 campaign was such that plans are already underway for the upcoming holiday season. The company behind the mouse ornaments, for instance, are working on some new designs inspired by the characters in the children's book, while Clark might just be penning a sequel to the first book, which proved to be so popular that schools invited her to come by for readings.

?These young people learn very quickly, they're watching us, and they learn very quickly by example what giving is and what joy comes from giving back and I think that was maybe one of the happiest times in the entire campaign for me,? says Clark. ?I am super-excited to repeat this next year.

?To customers, you helped us together do something great for our community and it is proof that when we all put a bit together from our own household we're able to make a meaningful difference. I am so proud to know that they all joined us in this venture and, as a result, we did some good things together.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter