

## Community pens record-setting number of Christmas cards for service personnel



It was all hands on deck throughout the community to make the holiday season that much brighter for the men and women serving in the Canadian Armed Forces ? and Aurora's Dianne and Brian Harrison not only handily achieved their goals, but set a new record in a milestone year.

For the last 20 years, the Harrisons been working tirelessly to mobilize the community to write Christmas cards and Holiday greetings for Canadian servicepersons. In this, a milestone year for their work, they're poised to send out a whopping 12,400 messages to soldiers stationed all around the world ? a significant uptick from their 10,000 goal.

?It's an absolute record ? we had counted 12,000 and then, in the last few days, we got another 400 in,? Dianne tells The Auroran.

The Harrisons are expected to hand-deliver the bounty to CFB Trenton this week and are doing so with full hearts, with special gratitude going out to such organizations as the Optimist Club of Aurora, The Men's Shed at the Aurora Seniors' Centre, CHATS (Community & Home Assistance to Seniors), various retirement homes and churches, all of which contributed hundreds ? or, in the case of the Optimists ? thousands of messages.

?My heart is beating so fast and so warm right now because I just feel the love that is being sent with every card that these soldiers are getting,? she says. ?I hope ? not hope, I know that every card will be received because, as I have said in the past, I believe both sender and receiver are truly blessed with this initiative.?

While the hard work of the above-listed organizations, and so many more individuals, contributed to make this year a triumph in numbers, when Harrison was asked what factors motivated so many to set pen to card this year, she says people are more aware now than ever before about what soldiers are experiencing overseas ? and here at home.

?People are concerned about their futures,? she says. ?People are striving, not thriving, these days, and I think that they've had more time to think about how fortunate we are to have the military that we do and the country that we live in.

?We look around and see what's all around us, and we're a very prosperous country, and we're thankful for where we live. I know there are many complaints, but I think we've got more pluses than minuses in our country.?

Contributions to this year's campaign from young writers, she adds, were ?absolutely stunning? and Dianne says they ?put more

heart into them ? more sparkles, more life.?

?The cards were so caring and the children really thought about what they were saying before they wrote. I believe that so many of the cards were written from their hearts. I believe their families must talk about it at home. Sometimes I worry about our children knowing too much and with A.I. now, how much are they reading is the truth.?

Cards from kids and teens were also organized and curated by the Aurora Public Library, while members of the public filled drop-off boxes at dozens of locations around the community, including the Seniors' Centre, the Aurora branch of the Royal Canadian Legion, and Chocolate & Co, to name just a few.

?What we found is when we put the boxes into some of the newer places, a lot of people were saying they didn't know about [the initiative] before, which surprised us because it has been going on for 20 years now ? it's just that new people have come into the community,? says Dianne. ?We had more people join us this year and now they want to become a part and do the same thing next year.?

But, will the Harrisons join them once again in leading this effort for a twenty-first year?

The couple answer in unison: ?Absolutely!?

In that case, if you have Christmas Cards left over after checking everybody off your own lists this year, save them for 2026 and think about what you might want to say to a Canadian soldier at home or abroad.

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