

Couple to mark special day with special trek benefiting Food Pantry



Some people look forward to retirement as a time to put up your feet and take life just a little bit easier ? but that is far from the case with George and Erlinda Biondic.

To mark his upcoming 70th birthday, George, along with his wife, 82, are gearing up for a lengthy trek, one which will see the couple walk from Lake Ontario to Barrie in support of the Aurora Food Pantry.

The Aurora residents are set to leave the city on foot on the morning of August 13, travelling Yonge Street, spending the night at home, and continuing their trek the next day to Barrie City Hall.

“Everyone has a birthday, but George has chosen to have a reverse birthday by giving to others,” says Allison Stuart, Board Chair of the Aurora Food Pantry. “He is going to walk from Toronto to Barrie and is encouraging his family and friends to celebrate his birthday walk by making donations to the Pantry. This amazing gesture will put food on the tables of our clients during these challenging times.”

While a walk from the foot of Toronto to Barrie City Hall might seem daunting to the average person, regardless of age, George and Erlinda Biondic are not your ordinary people. Since their retirement, they have dedicated themselves to physical fitness and running, each racking up several Canadian and International records in their age brackets.

George's family were refugees from former Yugoslavia and Erlinda immigrated to Canada from the Philippines. Like so many other refugees and immigrants, they came to Canada for a better life. Although they can understand firsthand the struggles that families face when starting over in a new country, they know that a better life is possible with the help and support of their neighbours.

“The way the economy is, people are going around hungry even in this wealthy nation of ours,” says George. “There's a real need here and we thought that if we could combine [our love of running with] addressing a real need, it was time to do something a little wild for my birthday and do something beyond us. It's benefiting our backyard of Aurora and our community where we have been living since 1993. We feel lucky to be here and we can't think of a better place to be.”

Aurora is also a great place to be when considering this lengthy walk.

On the GO line, they plan on taking the train down to Union Station ahead of the trip ? ?We're trying to do our little bit for climate change,? says George ? and taking it back to Aurora once they complete their mission at Barrie City Hall.

They scoped out the route by car, however, just a few weeks ago to make sure everything was in order and, most importantly, doable, and they're looking forward to making a difference in the local community.

This isn't the first time they've put their feet down on the road for a good cause. Several years ago, they travelled from the east coast of Canada with a group, bound for Ontario, to raise awareness and funds for Canada's Paralympians.

But this time it is decidedly a couple's effort for the Food Pantry.

?We haven't had any children so our life after we retired was looking around for something to do,? says George. ?For me, and for years, it was ultra-running and around six years ago Erlinda said, ?Well, why can't I do one of these races? She came out and did her first race, which was a three-day race and got a whole bunch of Canadian age records and she was having so much fun, did some more, got more records, and all this came out of the blue. Most often people say when you hit 65 it is time to sit back, do nothing, and your best years are behind you. I feel that the best years of your life don't have to be before 65. Erlinda is clear evidence of that because I would say probably some of the finest years in her life have been since she turned 65 and it has now been 17 years.

?Life has its opportunities. It doesn't have to end at 65 and no matter what your situation may be ? socio-economically, physically ? and no matter how bleak things may look, things can turn around. I guess that's kind of the message in this walk and in our lives.?

To contribute to George and Erlinda's fundraising walk benefiting the Aurora Food Pantry, visit aurorafoodpantry.ca, click DONATE, and select ?George Biondic's 70th Birthday Walk? from the drop-down menu.

?The summer is a challenging time at the Pantry as donations are down and families are seeking more help as children are home during the day,? says Ms. Stuart. ?Unanticipated generosity such as George's appeal to family and friends to donate to the Aurora Food Pantry in celebration of his birthday walk allow us to provide an extra boost to our clients' grocery hampers.?

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