

Decorators and designers putting on the glitz for annual home tour



By Brock Weir

For some people, Christmas brings to mind the idea of rustic coziness. For others, nothing spells out festive cheer like a blinged-out Christmas tree and glitzy décor that wouldn't be out of place in Hollywood itself. However you get your holiday on, there is something for everyone on this year's Pickering College Holiday Home Tour.

The 11th annual Holiday Home Tour gets underway next Friday, November 20, running through Saturday afternoon, and features six homes in Aurora, Newmarket, and Whitchurch-Stouffville that have been dressed to the nines by local interior decorators and floral designers, and doubling as performance venues for musicians from The Arts Music Store, the Piano Studio, Arcadia, and Pickering College itself, all to help raise money for Habitat for Humanity York Region.

Tickets are now on sale for \$30 though pickeringcollege.on.ca, but new this year will be a transportation service between homes leaving from the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex and Newmarket's Ray Twinney Complex, says Shelley Frank, Special Events Manager for Pickering College.

Whether you hop on the bus or drive yourself, you're in for a feast for all the senses. Home themes this year include "Christmas and All That Jazz", which incorporates musical holiday décor with live performances from a jazz ensemble, an Aurora home with a sea-theme decked out in whites and turquoises, the rustic russets and coppers of "Home for the Holidays", and a "Luxe Christmas Cabin" with an elegantly cozy atmosphere.

Additional stops are a 160-year-old church that has been completely renovated into an art gallery space. This Newmarket stop features a German theme with gingerbread cookies, live music, and even a small herd of live reindeer milling around for that extra Christmas theme.

Friday night will be the scene of a VIP Design Tour featuring design expert and TV personality Sharon Grech, who will be providing commentary on the feature home designs and answering questions from tour-goers. Saturday brings the Seasonal Boutique, which will be open to the public at Pickering College from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., bringing together businesses and local artisans from across York Region and a talk from City TV's Frankie Flowers at 3 p.m.

"It was really important to me that we make this opportunity available to everyone," says Ms. Frank. "Adding the transportation feature was very important to me for our seniors, but there are so many people who would love to participate but just don't drive or aren't comfortable driving. It is also really exciting to see the kids engaging with guests who are in the school and just helping them with their bags and directing them to various vendors."

Students also have a hand in decorating the school for the holiday boutique, performing their music at the homes, and earmarking a portion of the proceeds of the home tour to the charity of their choice. Having chosen Habitat for Humanity as their beneficiary, students visited the site of their upcoming Newmarket build to learn more about what the organization does at a local, national and international level, leaving with more than a degree of pride.

?We are helping to make it possible for a young family to have a comfortable home,? says Ms. Frank. ?Our understanding is the home this family is currently living in is just unacceptable by any standard. For us as a school we are really excited to be a part of that. Our senior students through their leadership class will be on the build site working with Habitat once the building is framed in, then our junior kindergarten students right through will have some responsibilities related to the build.?