

Durkin, 95, wears 'heart' on her sleeve as she continues work to help community



If she sees an area that needs a helping hand, and she's able to do so, Alma Durkin isn't afraid of getting her hands dirty.

Growing up in the United Kingdom during the Second World War, she signed up to be a 'Land Girl' to keep the country 'fed' and the Commonwealth 'fed' during the conflict.

As a long-time resident of Aurora, she drew upon these experiences of getting 'stuck in' at the start of the global pandemic to mobilize her Ardrill Crescent community, armed with little more than an iPad, to help stock shelves at the Aurora Food Pantry.

Now living in seniors' community on Aurora's east side, she didn't let being a newcomer in a bustling new complex get in the way of continuing her community-building efforts.

This month 'and this time armed with just a bit of yarn and some nimble fingers' she had almost her entire community wearing their hearts on their sleeves to raise much-needed funds for the Heart & Stroke Foundation.

'To tell you the truth, I was kind of down in the dumps and my son-in-law said, 'Alma needs a project,' says Ms. Durkin with characteristic modesty. 'I did something for the Food Bank and different things like that previously and he knew that. He thought with Valentine's Day coming up, it would be a good idea to do something and I just got a ball of red yarn and started knitting hearts. I didn't have a pattern or anything, but it was pretty easy and I started with 10 hearts and they just went, so I just kept doing it. I couldn't tell you how many I made as I didn't keep count of it, but we ended up with quite a lot of money.' The initiative, which was

carried out solely within The Meadows of Aurora, raised nearly \$600 for the Foundation.

Ms. Durkin, who was a resident of Ardill Crescent for nearly 40 years, moved into The Meadows last year when it was clear her husband of 72 years, himself a veteran of the Second World War, needed more help than she was able to provide as a sole caregiver at home.

It was a tough adjustment for the gregarious senior, but after a few stops and starts, she found her community within her new community and loves the place.

'It is a wonderful place,' she says. 'The people are just beautiful, kind ' and the food is amazing, but that is besides the point!'

But the people were more than willing to help with her initiative, she says.

'Everybody loved the hearts and they just kept asking each other, 'Where did you get that?' The girl at the front desk kept telling me, 'They're just going like crazy. It went really, really well. I was amazed and so happy.'

Alma's 'project' helped her adjust and she says she is now 'teasing' her fellow residents and staff on future projects that might catch her eye.

'Easter is coming, Christmas is coming, this is coming, that is coming, I am making jokes about the whole thing, but I don't know what the next one will be, but I am sure I am going to be up to something because this is a huge complex with a lot of people,' she says. 'I could see a project could get to be really quite big. I don't know if I would be able to keep up with that or not, but I might have to ask for help. The hearts were all done with just my fingers, and I am 95, you know!'

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter