

Empty Bowls and local restaurants keep local fundraiser alive

A hearty bowl of soup goes a long way to warming the heart ? but ladling it into a hand-crafted bowl while helping the community at the same time goes even further towards warming the soul.

This has long been the philosophy of Aurora's Pine Tree Potters Guild as they work with local restaurants on Empty Bowls, a collaboration which regularly helps raise more than \$20,000, divided equally between Welcoming Arms, a local ecumenical organization providing help to Aurora's most vulnerable citizens, and Inn from the Cold, a Newmarket-based non-profit working with the homeless.

For the past 10 years, ticketholders have been able to gather at the Aurora Cultural Centre to pick out a ceramic bowl hand-made by Guild members, have it filled by one of nearly a dozen local restaurants, and enjoy their meal with friends and family accompanied by live music.

Although COVID-19 has put Empty Bowls' traditional format onto the backburner for 2020, the fundraiser is set to continue in a new way on Saturday, November 28, with a bowl sale.

Tickets are on sale now for the event, which will see bowl selections take place at Trinity Anglican Church from 11 a.m. to 12.30 p.m., 1 p.m. to 2.30 p.m., and 3 p.m. to 4.30 p.m.

For the last year, Guild members have been hard at work crafting more than 600 ceramic bowls, all of which will be up for grabs. With each ticket purchase, a coupon book will be available with vouchers for local restaurants, which may be exchanged for an appetizer, a percentage off your meal, or, in the true spirit of Empty Bowls, a bowl of scratch-made soup.

?We knew we couldn't do a sit-down meal with COVID going on, but we still wanted to do something fabulous,? says Cathy Harris of the Pine Tree Potters Guild. ?We also needed to do this fundraiser because Welcoming Arms and Inn from the Cold need the funds ? probably more this year than ever before.?

Welcoming Arms, which is based out of Trinity, will host the bowl sale and Guild members have been making sure they have all health protocols in place before welcoming new and returning Empty Bowls patrons in.

?Our members have made more bowls this year than ever because both our spring and fall sales got cancelled due to COVID,? says Ms. Harris. ?We have over 600 bowls to choose from, so there are three time periods when people can come in, choose one or two bowls depending on how many tickets they have, and instead of having the chefs come in, we asked participating chefs if they would still like to participate [in this new way] and they were thrilled to do it.

?We were so happy they still wanted to do it and we're still able to raise the funds. Obviously, we won't be able to raise as much money as we had in the past. We were giving \$10,000 to each organization before.?

This year, the Guild hopes to raise \$12,000, which will be split between the two charities.

Tickets are still available and organizers say this is not only a great way to give back, but the perfect way to find unique holiday gifts as well.

?If anyone wants a nice hand-made pottery bowl, they can come in and get one for \$40, plus they get all the coupons to go with it,? says Ms. Harris. ?Having said that, if you purchase a ticket for \$40, you get the coupon booklet but once you've already purchased your ticket you can buy an additional empty bowl for \$30. You're able to take it home, have your own soup, and help your community at the same time.?

Tickets for the 11th Annual Empty Bowls Fundraiser are on sale now and must be secured in advance. They can be purchased from Meridian Credit Union (297 Wellington Street East) during regular business hours.

Participating restaurants include Vintage Spice, The Kitchen by Food in Motion, State and Main Kitchen and Bar ? Aurora, Romy's Restaurant and Lounge, Rockford's Bar and Grill - King City, Ristorante Orsini, Pine Farms Orchard, Maunders Food Shop, La Brehandaise Market, Graystones Restaurant, Dorio's Kettleby Italian Bakery, Catharina's Kitchen, Cachet Supper Club, Bijoy's Restaurant, and Aw Shucks Oyster Bar and Bistro.

For more information, visit www.pinetreepotters.ca.

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter