

Empty Bowls are filled to warm hearts across Aurora



By Brock Weir

Winter is just around the corner, and it is the time of year when many of us bundle up before leaving the comforts of our centrally heated homes to go about our daily business.

Many people in Aurora and Newmarket, however, are not so lucky and the season upon us presents many challenges to daily life.

At two sold-out sittings last week, local chefs joined forces with Aurora's Pine Tree Potters Guild to serve up soup in hand-made ceramic bowls to not only warm hearts and tummies, but to spread the warmth throughout the community for the weeks and months ahead.

This year's Empty Bowls was held at the Aurora Cultural Centre last Thursday, raising a whopping \$16,500 for two local charities ? Aurora's Welcoming Arms and Newmarket's Inn from the Cold. This year's efforts pushed their five-year fundraising total to over \$75,000.

?This helps us with the everyday needs of people in Aurora who are less fortunate, and it allows us not to have to worry about fundraising,? said Giselle Bedard of Welcoming Arms, which brings together six area churches to provide community supports for people throughout the Town. ?This money really helps us because we are busy doing the work, and this also encourages us. It really helps us do what we do best, which is to serve the people and help make ends meet.?

Welcoming Arms was also represented at Empty Bowls by Beverley Wood. She said the continuing support from the Pine Tree Potters through Empty Bowls is invaluable recognition for Welcoming Arms' mission throughout the community.

?It is a recognition of the benefits of partnership and that is the excitement ? the potters sharing their talents and skills with us so we can make a difference,? said Ms. Wood. ?We all live in Aurora, we intermingle, and we care about each other. Fortunately, in the past, we have been a recipient of their generosity and we have a number of our volunteers here today and we just love being here. This will really help facilitate increasing the programs we want to get involved with so we can help those who just need a step up.?

Ms. Wood added the services they provide through Welcoming Arms not only helps people who come seeking assistance to make

those ends meet, but it has a ripple effect in both the clients' lives and the people they interact with.

'It lets them feel good about themselves to know that they can put their shoulders back, look in the mirror and say, 'I like what I see.' This means introducing them to services in our community, helping them to write a résumé to get a job, and I think most of the people really want to better themselves and look after their families. They want their kids to be happy and well educated and certainly with the assistance through this contribution we are going to be able to do more of this.'

While representatives from each outreach group had volunteers and information on hand for ticketholders, inside Brevik Hall, chefs from across Aurora and Newmarket were whipping up their own creations, including Inn From The Cold's chefs who were ladling out celeriac soup with parsnip chips.

In the Great Hall, Lisa Chong, Sales and Marketing Coordinator for Eat In Catering, Inn From the Cold's hospitality branch, was flying the flag for the group.

'This is great exposure for us,' she said of the winter shelter based in Newmarket. 'We have so many levels where we need support. We need volunteers, we need donations, and we even look for more people to come to the shelter. People just don't know that we're around necessarily, so for us to be in the community to build awareness of us is good on so many levels.'

Their share of the \$16,500 will go directly into the shelter, which runs annually from November to March. But, in addition to their seasonal shelter, education programs run year-round, as do their health and wellness programs.

'We have our community meal on Friday nights where people tend to come out in droves and get something warm and satisfying in them,' said Ms. Chong. 'They are always coming in for not just beds, but a change of clothes and a place to warm up and clean up. We have showers and are a full service facility where they can come and do laundry.'