

Empty Bowls set to warm hearts in new location

An empty bowl can go a long way to warm a heart in need, and despite the ongoing challenges of the global pandemic, Aurora's Pine Tree Potters Guild is hard at work to ensure local residents in need are able to access a helping hand.

This November, the Pine Tree Potters Guild will host its 12th annual Empty Bowls fundraiser, one which has raised tens of thousands of dollars for Aurora's Welcoming Arms, an ecumenical organization dedicated to lending a hand and sharing a meal with community members in need, and Newmarket-based homeless organization Inn from the Cold.

In the lead-up to Empty Bowls, Guild members make hundreds of hand-crafted bowls which can be picked out by each ticket holder and, once their selection is made, take their bowl to be filled by one of up to a dozen chefs serving signature soups, which can then be shared together in the spirit of fellowship and fundraising.

As was the case for so many popular local events, COVID was a game changer and the Guild re-tooled their event last year to a 'bowl sale' under a tent. In addition to picking out a bowl, ticket-holders received a coupon entitling them to a soup at the local restaurant of their choice.

This year will once again be a 'bowl sale' event, but in a new indoor location: Newmarket's Old Town Hall (460 Bosford Street).

'The coupon book was a great initiative to not only link people to soup but link people to restaurants that are also in need of our support,' says Lisa-Marie Oliphant, Empty Bowls Chair for the Pine Tree Potters Guild. 'These have been long-standing partnerships that we have had over the years and we want to make sure we're supporting them as well. This year's event will not be taking place in Aurora and it will not be taking place in a tent. We have been able to progress a little bit because the pandemic rules allow us to gather inside.'

'This year we have volunteers from both Inn from the Cold and Welcoming Arms at our event, on hand for the community to get to know them more and they were hungry to join up! We make these beautiful bowls, they're empty and we want to still fill them with coupons and those coupons are good for a year. You can keep refilling your bowls and the cost of \$40 per ticket is helping to fill other people's bowls and they need it now more than ever.'

Ms. Oliphant knows firsthand the work each organization provides the community, particularly Welcoming Arms, which she visited at a recent Wednesday night drive-through for meals for community members in need.

'There is every type of person volunteering at Welcoming Arms: people who are young, people who are no longer in the workforce, people from the community dropping off baked goods because they know little children who are in need will get to have sweets and baked goods just like they used to have. The common thread is trying to give people a sense of community, love and support. With people driving up to Welcoming Arms for a warm meal, I was able to witness in a single week the various teams preparing and packaging the food and serving the food to people in need. It was a small act of kindness and effort to give people warmth, food and comfort. I know this is making a big difference.'

While Pine Tree Potters Guild Members can feel satisfied they are helping the community through Empty Bowls, they are set this year to have additional creative satisfaction.

Now that indoor events are able to take place, albeit with public health measures in force, the Guild will also host a pottery show and sale in conjunction with the Empty Bowls event at the same menu.

'It is going to be enriching for our members,' says Ms. Oliphant. 'We create art and we create functional art and not being able to put that out into the world there are a lot of shelves that are full. They are excited to be able to share their art with the community. A lot of them are Canadian small business owners as well who have taken a hit by not being able to sell their products, which is

pottery. There are well over 20 potters who are going to be in that space with our beautiful bowls room [adjacent].?

The 12th Annual Pine Tree Potters' Guild Empty Bowls Fundraiser will take place November 18 (4-8 p.m.), 19 (10 a.m. to 2 p.m.), and 20 (10 a.m. ? 2 p.m.) at Newmarket's Old Town Hall. Three bowl selection dates are designated to allow for physical distancing and to otherwise manage numbers indoors.

Everyone aged 12 and older entering Old Town Hall will be required to show proof of COVID-19 full vaccination and government identification.

Tickets are \$40 each and must be purchased in advance from Aurora's Meridian Credit Union, located at 297 Wellington Street East.

For more information, visit www.pinetrepotters.ca.

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter