

## Giving Store helps you cross items of Holiday shopping list, benefit community at same time



Finding the perfect gift for someone on your holiday shopping list can be stressful at the best of times ? but Oakridge's Fashions has stepped up to take away some of the guesswork, while helping the community at the same time.

On Wednesday night, Oakridge's Fashions, the popular boutique located in Aurora's historic downtown core, formally turned on the lights of their in-store Christmas Tree, heralding the arrival and opening of their now-traditional Giving Shop.

Located within their store on Yonge Street, just south of Wellington, the Giving Shop offers gift ideas for just about everyone on your list ? and proceeds from each sale will benefit Southlake Regional Health Centre's Emergency Care, the Alzheimer Society of York Region, Aurora Food Pantry, CHATS (Community & Home Assistance to Seniors), the Canadian Federation of University Women Aurora-Newmarket's scholarship programs, and Marquee Theatrical Productions.

?The Giving Shop began [during the pandemic] one day after we learned the store was going to be closed once again for the holiday season and we bought a tree and put it up in the store to cheer ourselves up,? says Oakridge's owner Deb Clark, at the tree lighting event, where she was joined by Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MP Leah Taylor Roy, Mayor Tom Mrakas, and Councillors Rachel Gilliland and Ron Weese. ?We put some little ornaments on it, some little mice, and the very next day I got a call from Sandra Seepaul at the Aurora Food Pantry saying they were in need because so many people were out of work. We decided to sell the little mice and to give the proceeds to the Aurora Food Pantry.

?As soon as our very loyal customer base learned that, we stripped the tree nine times and ran out of mice. I love that sometimes out of very hard times is when goodness can begin.?

While the Giving Shop does indeed offer something for everyone, young ones will particularly enjoy the third installment of a series of children's books penned by Clark just for the Giving Shop, tales inspired by the mice that started it all.

?Starting three years ago, I put pen to paper and tried to bring something to life in a little children's book,? Clark said. ?They always meet in a factory in Montreal where they are made as little ornaments and there is always some adventure they get into, with a sweet and endearing story about how they overcome their challenges to come to a happy end and a merry Christmas.

?This year, the story is about four little characters who meet in the shipping bin; they get separated in the shipping room and two of

them go to 'Harrings' of London, don't you know, and two of them come to Oakridge's of Canada. It's about how all they really want for Christmas is to find each other again ? and, of course, Santa always makes that happen. He also helps them understand that sometimes friends cannot always live in the same place, but they can nevertheless stay in touch and be friends forever.?

Looking over this year's community partners, many of which were represented at last week's reception, Clark shared that she tries to make sure money goes to organizations she believes to be among the 'pillars' of the Aurora community ? benefiting healthcare, senior care, and providing opportunities for students.

'I really felt the Alzheimer Society of York Region was doing an important job with something that is that is starting to affect more and more people, not just the generation I am in now, the Baby Boomers, who are even finding a spouse being diagnosed, but they're also seeing an elder relative, perhaps a mum or a dad afflicted. The work that they do supports not just the person who is diagnosed with Alzheimer's, but the caregivers. That's the real social?that I think they're doing so well and we want to help them do that. CHATS is another organization not new to all of us, but we certainly are all aware of what CHATS is and what they do, but I think of the demographics and I think about the aging Boomers and their aging seniors and I thought this year they belonged in the mix for that reason.

'We will always support the food shortage, we will always look at education, so we brought back for a second year the Canadian Federation of University Women and their scholarship program. We will always look to support youth in some way and culture, so that's where Marquee Theatrical Productions comes in. Every few years we switch up the beneficiaries in order to give everyone a chance to participate and, quite frankly, for Oakridge's to get an opportunity to learn more about the needs that are out there for other agencies.

'Their spend (at the Giving Shop) is doing two things at once: it's giving a gift and the gift is giving back.?

**By Brock Weir**