

## Growing Together: Aurora Greenhouse turns over new leaf



**By Brock Weir**

As Aurora celebrates its 150th anniversary, The Auroran continues its series on some of the long-standing Aurora businesses that have served generations. This week: Aurora Greenhouse at Yonge Street and Ransom Street.

After over 100 years on roughly the same block on Aurora's busiest street, change is in the air at Aurora Greenhouse.

The venerable florist shop, which has served Aurora since its founding by the Nisbet family in 1911, will move next month to Industrial Parkway South. Their home for nearly 50 years on the east side of Yonge Street at Ransom was sold Thursday to a new owner, leaving present owner, Robin Winter, excited for the change to come.

When Ms. Winter bought the business about eight years ago, it was something of a homecoming, as she had one of her very first jobs in the floral industry in the very same building 34 years ago.

The business has its roots just across the street, first founded as a series of greenhouses by Colin 'Pop' Nisbet just across the street. By the mid-1960s, they had moved most of their operations across the street where it continues to this day, welcoming back a steady stream of longstanding and new customers.

While there is some trepidation that some of this will be lost when they move to 225 Industrial Parkway South next month, they believe the name they have continued to build upon the Nisbet legacy will be a hallmark of their new future.

'Robin is very family-oriented, very traditional in her choice of picks, and she believes in dealing with small towns and dealing with a small-town feel, keeping focused on the product,' says sales associate Pat Dexter.

For Pat, the attention to customer service is key to their success. They stock the freshest products they can, stand behind their stems, and have a very healthy roster of clients.

'I think the saddest part [of the move] is just the local walk-ins that we have,' she says. 'We have several seniors' homes in the area - Park Place, Sunrise, and Cobblestone - and we have a lot of people who like to come in and visit. We will miss that day-to-day contact for sure, and miss being in a location where people can drive by and see us all the time. We're risking some of that, but we believe that our name and our service for so many years will hold that spot.'

It's not as though they had a choice in the move as while Ms. Winter owned the business, the building was not in their hands.

Nevertheless, in their new location, they believe they will be able to significantly cut overhead costs, returning that value to the customer, and also have room to mount bigger projects and create floral decorations for larger events.

An Aurora girl, born and raised, Ms. Winter's primary interest has always been flowers. Inspired by the offerings in her father's garden, she would venture out into it, pick a few selections and make little arrangements. She realised floral design could be a career at the age of 18, after starting a part-time job in Richmond Hill two years before. Sticking with the industry, she left, married, and raised her children, but came back to the greenhouse which started it all this time, taking over the ownership.

Since her very first days with the Aurora Greenhouse, she has seen the community develop and grow. What started off as working in a business servicing a small town has grown to a business serving a much larger town, while still striving for small-town service.

"This is a new beginning and it is all good," she says. "We're turning a new leaf and it is going to be fun and we're all excited about it. Over the years, business has changed. Grocery stores and supermarkets have definitely [had an impact] but we have put ourselves above that. To me, service is key."

Pat adds as the business and community have evolved, there aren't as much walk-ins, but a significantly higher number of phone and, as one might expect, internet orders, whether through their own website or Facebook.

"Change is hitting us from different avenues and we have to adjust and we have to go with the flow," says Pat. "Things have to change but we have to have this level of service up there and go with the times. This building is just a shell of what Aurora Greenhouse is."