

Holiday Heroes program is another success with just days to go



By Brock Weir

Have you ever sat across an office from somebody and wondered what they were like as a child?

Employees at Southlake Regional Health Centre recently tried to do just that, while collecting toys for the Holiday Heroes campaign for the York Region Children's Aid Society.

Staff members took the last few weeks to size up their colleagues, trying to figure out what they would have like to receive as gifts, had they still been children. It was a daring experiment ? after all, would you wonder what kind of vibe you're giving off if the ideal gift for you is apparently a teen vampire bodice-ripper?

Either way, it was all for a good cause and these toys were piled on top of hundreds of others collected by the Southlake community and the community at large for the campaign.

With the retirement of York Regional Police Deputy Chief Bruce Herridge, both from the force and the Southlake Board, the Holiday Heroes campaign within Southlake was inherited by Andrea Griepsma. It was a task which ended up far bigger than she ever expected, but she was excited to meet the challenge head-on. ?We exchanged gifts with one another, thinking what you would like as a child,? she said. ?We sat together, opened them up, and we had a few laughs with everything we're donating today. It was a fun way to participate, donate, and a lot of other departments did their own little drives.

?There was one book, and the title was a bit questionable, but apparently it is a good book! It was geared towards the teen population, so the nice thing about this is we're buying for a variety of ages, have gift cards, personal hygiene supplies, and even pairs of shoes.?

Looking for just the right gift to show off to have his picture taken, Southlake President and CEO Dr. Dave Williams, himself a former astronaut, zeroed in on a plush Buzz Lightyear. For him, it was an opportunity not just to highlight the mountain of toys collected by Southlake, but to thank both the York Regional Police and all the volunteers who made it possible.

?The holiday season?is a time for us to step back and reflect in our lives of what is truly important to all of us, which is to spend time with friends, family and loved ones, but it can also be a time of great stress,? he said. ?This stress comes essentially from things we impose on ourselves, the desire to entertain all of our friends and family, to go out and shop, to bake and prepare, the social obligations we feel we have in going to various parties and not being able to provide to our family and loved ones as we go forward.

?While it can be overwhelming for some of us experiencing this stress, for certain members of our community, it can be a real

challenge for them to find the gifts they want to be able to give to their family and loved ones, to be able to provide meals for their loved ones and to be able to celebrate the holiday season. That is why we are here today ? to share and to be able to extend our support out into the community, to provide families with toys they are able to give to their kids this holiday season.?

Following a quick evaluation of the hundreds of items collected in the drive, Southlake staff and members of the York Regional Police collected everything together and wheeled it outside, filling a van bound for the Children's Aid Society.

According to YRP Constable David Collie, the Holiday Heroes Program has collected over \$700,000 in monetary donations, as well as new toys, and new kids clothing and food since its inception in 2008. One of the benefits of this program is all donations received in York Region will stay in York Region.

?Since November 12, York Regional Police has received over \$80,000 alone just in donated items,? he said. ?During the last couple of weeks I have been to the Salvation Army Depot, to the CAS Depot and I am dropping off items donated to various businesses. I am humbled by the amount, the volume, and the generosity of our community.?