

Hundreds gather for tree lighting, as Salvation Army looks for helping hand



By Brock Weir

Crowds gathered in the forecourt of Aurora Town Hall for the annual Christmas Tree Lighting ceremony.

Families gathered around the tree, hot chocolate and candy canes in hand, eagerly awaiting the arrival of Santa Claus to coax the lights on as Mrs. Claus joined Mayor Geoffrey Dawe and Councillors to do the honours.

‘It is not cold, but there is a warmth in the hearts of the people in the Town of Aurora,’ said Town Crier John Webster at the start of the festivities. ‘It’s the people of character, the people around here who have filled the community by connecting with others and living those old time values.

‘Today is the ninth official tree-lighting ceremony; a time to greet old friends, a time to greet new acquaintances, a time to experience the traditional carolling, and a time to enjoy the lights of our collective spirit.’

As kids lined up to place their homemade ornaments on the tree, along with some others they might have brought from home, it was a message reiterated by Major Brian Bishop of the Salvation Army as he led the Salvation Army’s brass band through their traditional round of Christmas Carols.

At the centre of the band, was an iconic Salvation Army Christmas Kettle, the likes of which have been popping up at numerous occasions around Aurora over the last few weeks. The kettle drive, which is now in full swing, is still in its early days but every coin or bill dropped into the clear bubble will go a long way to helping the community.

Major Bishop told *The Auroran* at last week’s ceremonies that over 500 families in Aurora and Newmarket have already come to the Salvation Army for assistance leading up to the holiday season and this number, as it always does, will continue to grow.

‘We’re anticipating we’re going to hit the 1,000 mark which will represent anywhere between 3,000 and 3,500 people,’ said Major Bishop. ‘There is certainly a segment of those people who are singles and a significant portion of those are single parents. In fact, last year, of the 800 families we served, 59 per cent of them were single parents.’

It’s a trend, he says, that is also growing and that can be attributed to contemporary culture where a number of families are ‘broken’ or ‘dysfunctional families’ and that is increasingly becoming a significant need.

Joining the Salvation Army in their efforts this year is, once again the Aurora Lions Club which is helping to prepare holiday hampers, as well as local companies waiting to lend a hand.

?As you talk to people, as much as there are people that need hampers and need toys, one of the things we are joyful of is being a part of the Christmas Day dinner Jonathan's Restaurant helps to sponsor, as well as Welcoming Arms,? says Major Bishop. ?We make that known to our clients. The need isn't just for people who are needy, but for people who might be lonely and find this time of year a difficult experience for them to just have on their own.?

That being said, while donations of food and toys are always welcome, sometimes the most immediate assistance one can provide is signing up for a kettle and just ringing a bell.

?That is one of the primary needs we have at this time for volunteers,? said Major Bishop. ?If there is a person or a group of people who want to help out at our toy depot, we can bring them into help sort some of the donations we receive.

?[The success of the Kettle Campaign] is all representative in how many volunteers we have. The more volunteers we have, the more we are able to collect. That money goes towards not just Christmas, but it sustains us through the year in terms of our community programming to help those in need.?