

Inaugural exhibit sheds light Salvation Army's history and work in community



The Salvation Army is a common sight in this community, particularly during this time of year, when the jingling of bells at kettles throughout the community remind us of the importance of giving back.

But the Salvation Army is active all year-round both here in the Aurora area and across the country.

As the Kettle Campaign kicks into high gear ahead of Christmas, a new exhibit at Hillary House National Historic Site, curated by the Salvation Army at Northridge Community Church on Leslie Street, just north of Wellington, and the Aurora Historical Society (AHS) is shining new light on their work and their roots.

Located in one of the upstairs exhibition rooms, the array of artefacts selected from the Salvation Army's national archives in Scarborough tell a very local story that dates back more than 140 years.

On display are historic photographs of notable Salvation Army officers, buildings throughout the community with ties to the organization, representation of brass bands from throughout its history, paintings, heritage uniforms, and even a resin figure depicting the Christmas Kettle set-up created to mark the Salvation Army's 90th anniversary in 1972.

"I started with the Salvation Army in a staff role in July of 2021 after attending [Northridge] since 2018, and personally I had a lot of knowledge about the history and understanding personally the reality of services, programs and support we provide, but I set out to find out more about the work," Angela Covert, Community Relations Representative with Northridge Community Church, who took on the role of curator for the show. "Leading up to my first Kettle Campaign, I saw as I was out in the community the reality that people – maybe new Canadians or those who have maybe no faith background – didn't have an understanding of what we do. Even in the church we have individuals who don't know about the service roles that we have."

When Covert first learned about the national archive in November of 2021, she asked to come see the artefacts and reached out to the Aurora Historical Society and Hillary House as a potential location to bring the Salvation Army story to the community.

"I went down to the Archives and Majors Mike LeBlanc and Major Ron Miller got very excited because this is the first time they had actually taken many of these items out for an opportunity like this," says Covert.

It was also a first-time opportunity for the Historical Society, says AHS curator Kathleen Vahey, in being approached by community group to co-host an exhibition such as this.

"This is the first time we've had an outside organization approach us and I thought it was a really interesting idea, definitely the

history of the Salvation Army in the local area which is over 130 years old," she says. "As the AHS, we're always interested in telling stories about the community at large and then we have this beautiful space inside Hillary House. When Angela reached out, I thought it was a great idea, I brought it to the Board, and they agreed. As long as it had the focus on Newmarket and Aurora. Such good work has been done by the Salvation Army and continues to be such a big presence in Town. I definitely think it's important to showcase this history and hopefully it's exciting it's the first time a lot of these things have been outside the Salvation Army archives and we're excited to get people through."

As they look ahead to people seeing more of the exhibition, both Covert and Vahey agree that it's a win-win for both groups.

"I hope people learn the long history of the Salvation Army in the local area," says Vahey. "The 1880s is a long time as a constant presence and they're still here today, still doing good work, and those services are available."

Adds Covert: "We hope people leave with an awareness of the Salvation Army. We need to be reinventing ourselves and making it relevant to the community that is here today. I am concerned, to be honest, of individuals who aren't aware, because maybe they come from countries that don't know the Salvation Army and this is just giving them an opportunity to see that we're not an 'army' in the sense of anything military, but we're an Army of individuals who are here to serve and care."

For more information, visit aurorahs.com. The exhibition will be available to the public through December 23.

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