

Kitchen Party will be maritime celebration to benefit local mental health programs

A traditional Newfoundland kitchen party is taking shape in Aurora ? and it's not just a time for a new spin on being Screeched In, it's all to benefit local mental health programs.

The Newfoundland Kitchen Party in support of Community Mental Health Services is set for Thursday, September 18, at the Salvation Army's Northridge Community Church and picks up after two years of galas helped foster the important mental health services that come out of their community hub on Leslie Street, just north of Wellington Street.

Angela Covert, who has led fundraising for Northridge for the last few years, including the past two years of galas, was inspired to switch things up from the previously formal affair to more of a celebration partially out of the wonderful experiences she and her husband had last summer visiting the Province ? but also in recognizing the unique position our country is now in.

?I had known when I started at the Salvation Army that (the organization) continues to have a very big presence in Newfoundland,? says Covert. ?A lot of the officers I connect with through the Salvation Army have their roots in Newfoundland themselves, including Captain Fred Reid here at our office, and I started to think about the impact of the Salvation Army, not just in Newfoundland but in Canada in general. Looking at all that, and having a better sense not only of the Province but its people, the fun, and the impact of the Salvation Army there, I got to thinking about what it might look like to do a kitchen party over the gala.

?The other influence for me has been just the challenges that everybody is facing, not just financially, but just the sadness of what is happening in the world? and the impact of Trump's tariffs and also the rhetoric of taking us over, I just wanted something that was purely Canadian and fun.?

Since its inception, the first two mental health galas hosted by Salvation Army Northridge raised nearly \$60,000 for their community programs, and has significantly boosted awareness of what the Salvation Army has to offer for people who are struggling with their mental health ? so much so they have formed valuable partnerships with such local organizations as Southlake Health and Abuse Hurts to be part of that mental health continuum in the central and northern York Region area.

This is expected to only ramp up as they gear up for the September 18 event.

It promises to be an evening of great music featuring Off the Rock, North America's premier tribute to Great Big Sea, a band which has been gaining a steady following in the Greater Toronto Area, traditional food, a type of Screeching In ceremony where, at this alcohol-free affair, a mixture of Newfoundland's Purity Syrup will be mixed with water as a stand-in for the potent potable, and a marketplace of traditional Newfoundland products courtesy of Freezerland.

Organizers also promise ?a few surprises that may include a fish,? so perhaps it wouldn't be a bad idea to bring some Chapstick in case you're asked to kiss a cod!

?I took note of all the other events that were happening in our community and there were a lot of galas, a lot of higher-end-price-point fundraisers, and that helps generate funds, but I just wanted to offer something that was a little bit lighter, a lot more fun,? says Covert, adding food will be provided by Carmen Holloway, previously of The Puffin, which served the Holland Landing area with traditional maritime fare. ?Kitchen party? How much fun is that? When you have people over to your house, where do people often hang out? It's in the kitchen and that's where all the great conversations happen. I think it resonates with individuals just because, in my line of work, we just often see the bad, but my hope is this is really going to bring the good and just the joy. I want there to be that atmosphere of, ?I've come to somebody's house and we're just having a party.'

?Our focus is mental health and the event will be for our mental health services. Right now, we have our psychotherapists on staff and my hope is now that that's getting more and more established, we will be able to branch out into more specific programs for youth and hire at minimum a part-time person who would look at more youth counselling supports.?

Tickets for the Newfoundland Kitchen Party in Support of Community Mental Health Services are on sale now. To purchase, call 905-895-6276 or visit Salvation Army Northridge at 15338 Leslie Street.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter