

Let the Lions wrap your gifts and help families in need



By Brock Weir

Wrapping up presents collected in the lead-up to the holidays can be daunting for many, but if you're one of these people, don't sweat it; bring your bundles over to the Aurora Shopping Centre and let the Lions Club do it for you, while you help local families in need.

Beginning this Thursday, December 3, the Lions Club, in partnership with the Shopping Centre, will be on hand each Thursday and Saturday through December 19 to wrap your gifts in exchange for donations to their organization.

Their plaza unit, turned over to them by the Aurora Shopping Centre for the holiday season, not only serves as their giftwrapping headquarters, but also as a depot for donations for their annual food and gift drives for needy families.

"It is one central location for people to come and see us," says Trudy Stunden of the Aurora Lions. "We do have gift boxes around the community and in our schools, but this is one place where they can come and drop their toys off, see where we are, and we can wrap their gifts for a donation. It is a win-win, in my opinion."

The partnership between the Lions and the plaza was helped facilitated by Kerry Marchment of the Aurora Shopping Centre. The Lions have long been active within the Centre for their food and gift drive and when this empty unit presented itself, Ms. Marchment said it was the perfect fit.

"We thought it would be a great opportunity to raise more money to stay in the community," she says. "The awesome thing about the Lions Club for us too is the donations remain in the Aurora Community. I encourage people to leave their gifts, go shopping here, and bring gifts from wherever to support it."

In their annual food and gift drive, the Aurora Lions work in conjunction with the Salvation Army of Central York. The Lions collect the toys and the Salvation Army begins the process of paving the way for these donations to get to local needy families.

Last year, they helped 161 families and this year they expect this number to rise because the Children's Aid Society is no longer running their own drive and have reached out to the Salvation Army and their community partners to help fill any gaps in the system.

While collecting toys is rarely an issue, each year they find it increasingly difficult collecting gifts for teens and infants, something they are putting particular emphasis on this year. Collecting food also presented a challenge in last year's drive. No family was left

behind, but holiday hampers did not offer the variety in which the Lions took pride.

?In doing things like the gift wrapping where we can actually generate some cash, it is a good thing for the Aurora Lions because at Christmastime for the 161 families we have, we supply gift cards (including grocery gift cards) and they are quite expensive, anywhere from \$35 if you have a member of one family, up to \$80 if you have a family of four,? says Lion Jim Bondy. ?It generally costs us anywhere between \$9,000 and \$10,000 for gift cards every year. When we can actually generate cash to go against that, it really helps out the Lions.?

Adds Ms. Stunden: ?Toys, food, cash, we'll take it all! We used to do a huge program where we needed 10,000 square feet and we did perishable and non-perishable foods. We had turkeys, hams, and the whole works, but now we give them food vouchers from No Frills so they can go and get the food.?

To take part in the Charity Gift Wrap, or to swing by and make your donation, the Lions will be in operation on Thursday nights from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m., and on Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., through December 19.