

Lipstick and a Blue Jays cap -- the simple things can make Senior Wishes come true



By Brock Weir

Santa Claus is a busy guy on Christmas Eve, but after zipping around the world giving gifts to all the girls and boys on his "nice" list last year, he stopped off at Chartwell Aurora for a visit with residents "and thanks to your help, it turned out to be an epic stay. "We had elves on the inside," says Rachel Smith of Chartwell Aurora (formerly Resthaven). "We took one of our carts, turned it into a sleigh, and Santa and his little elves went delivering [to the senior residents]. Just to see that moment of opening a gift "whether it was red lipstick or a six pack of beer "just seeing the faces was amazing and it probably took him about four hours to deliver everything because Santa would stop, talk and open, stop talk and open."

Santa's visit to Chartwell Aurora would have been a lot shorter without Aurora stepping up to the plate because the gifts delivered by Santa that morning were not made by the elves themselves, rather they were donations collected during the holiday season from local companies and individuals through the Senior Wish Association.

Now that the season is upon us, the Association is hoping to bring more companies into the fold to adopt groups of seniors, or an entire floor at Chartwell to make Santa's stay even longer.

This year, companies and groups involved in the Adopt A Floor program include the Aurora Public Library, Chartwell Hollandview Trail, Prime Data, Vaughan's Starlane Homes, and Park Place Manor.

"I have ballparked 100 residents already covered, but we need gifts for about 150 more," says Ingrid Davis of the Aurora-Newmarket Branch of the Senior Wish Association, suggesting businesses, and even book clubs, get involved and take on adopting a whole floor, or even 10 seniors at Christmastime.

Those stepping up to adopt a floor "or even adopt an individual "will receive wish lists made by Chartwell Aurora residents to make the holiday season brighter. Wishes include things as simple as picture frames and a tube of lipstick (pink is in this season, according to the lists), but there is also a growing number of seniors keen to get some Blue Jays gear, whether a baseball glove or a Jose Bautista t-shirt.

"Seniors need so little, but they need that little so much," says Ms. Davis. "It does not take a lot to make them smile and to let them know they are remembered by somebody. It is about remembering them, especially on Christmas Day."

Ms. Davis founded the Aurora and Newmarket chapter of the Senior Wish Association five years ago, but this year, having recently moved to Picton, she is handing the reins over to Eve Kotusiewicz, who has spearheaded the initiative in Innisfil.

"I am hoping to fill Ingrid's shoes because she has done an amazing job," says Ms. Kotusiewicz. "I worked for the Royal Bank for 30 years and I have always worked with seniors. I just love to see a senior smile. We hear so many stories of kids getting power of attorney, sell the mother's house, take everything, throw them into an old age home and never visit them and my heart just breaks. When a co-worker told me about Seniors Wish, I just jumped on board.

"Seniors really are forgotten [during the holidays]. I think the seniors have done so much. They have worked, they have paid their taxes, and they have done so much in their lifetime. Now that they are ending their life, they are going without, which is so sad. With

people, I find that people are very, very giving. If you actually explain to them why you're doing it, because some of the seniors need bare necessities like underwear and bras, who is going to say no to that??

Indeed, over the years, Ms. Davis, Ms. Smith, and now Ms. Kotusiewicz, say they have been encouraged by the enthusiasm with which individuals and companies have embraced the Senior Wish Association, but they are hoping this continues to only grow. Adding one more person to your Christmas list might seem like a daunting task, but when you take a close look at what the seniors need and want, it doesn't have to be. And when you can take on a group of 10, 25, or an entire floor as a company or volunteer group, not only is it an easy thing to do, but it can be a fun team-building exercise as well.

?We in long term care supply a lot in the way of body washes, towels and main toiletries for care, but what I am finding when we're putting our lists together there are one-offs, the nice head bands or berets, the lipsticks, the little bit of blusher for the cheeks,? says Ms. Smith. ?One gentlemen wants some aftershave or the things we put on a daily basis. It's anything to make them feel good.?

For more information on how your company or group can adopt a floor or an individual, contact Eve Kotusiewicz of the Senior Wish Association by calling 705-321-6538 or email evекot@rogers.com. After contacting Ms. Kotusiewicz, gifts can be wrapped, labelled with the senior's name, and delivered directly to Chartwell Aurora by December 15.