

Local youth bring coffee house back for second year, continuing efforts for Ukrainian schools



By Brock Weir

A lot can happen over the course of a year.

12 months after local students Anna Sofia Lesiv of Nobleton and Sally Falk of Aurora pooled their resources and their talents to put together a coffee house evening of music and art to raise money for schools in Ukraine, the country itself has experienced significant turmoil, with not only the course of its own history changed, but that of its area of Europe.

While Ukraine has changed significantly over the course of the year, along with the awareness of the rest of the world of the plight of its citizens, at least one thing remains constant and that the desire of these students to help.

Anna and Sally will take over the Aurora Cultural Centre next Saturday, November 15, for the second annual Coffee House, which will raise funds to purchase new computers for rural Ukrainian schools. Bringing together the artistic, vocal and poetic talents of students from Aurora, King, Newmarket, and beyond, last year's efforts raised over \$600 for the cause, allowing the group (via the non-profit they founded called theyouthinformer.com) to purchase two computers for a rural school and shoulder the cost of internet and wi-fi installation.

Last year, the money went to a town in the Ukraine's Carpathian Mountains, and hopefully this year if we raise more money it can be put towards buying more new computers instead of all the set-up costs. Money will be going to the same school this year, hopefully just to grow the computer lab we have already set up there and hopefully in the future we can expand into other schools in the Carpathian Mountains.

The students decided to bring the Coffee House back for a second year based on the success of the first, which was held last November. If numbers hold fast, or even improve, they plan to make it an annual event continue their efforts for rural Ukraine. They set an ambitious goal for last year's event, aiming for around 100 people, but they want to make it even bigger and better this year.

People, says Sally, loved the music brought forward last year and particularly liked the idea that it was youth performers and a youth audience raising money for their peers overseas. Sticking with their winning formula, a few performers are returning for a second year, with new slam poets coming in from Aurora, Newmarket and Richmond Hill, and a host of new singers and artists.

While there is no unifying theme for the performances, the same cannot be said of the cause. Over the past year, Sally says

circumstances have made people more aware of what they are trying to do. Not a week goes by, she says, highlighting the issues being experienced by Ukrainians and it is easy to see that help, particularly where rural populations are concerned, is needed now more than ever.

?If these rural areas are connected to the internet and wifi they would have the ability to hear what is happening all around the world,? she says.

Although the past 12 months have brought considerable turmoil to the country, the group has not felt any further obstacles being put in their way to fulfilling their mandate.

?We got some lovely photos from the school and the kids wrote us a nice thank you card and posted pictures of them opening up their computers,? says Sally. ?They just seemed so happy and relieved that now they have this access to technology that they didn't have before where they can really connect to this global network of information. To see a whole class of 30 students open up two computers and be so excited that now they can share this makes you realise how blessed you are. For them, this one act of kindness can really change their lives.?

But Sally and Anna can't do it on their own. They need your help. The Coffee House is set to take place at the Aurora Cultural Centre (22 Church Street) on November 15. Doors open a 6.45 p.m. for a 7 p.m. show time. Admission is a \$5 minimum donation.

Donations can also be accepted through theyouthinformer.com throughout the year. Although they are only accepting monetary donations right now, they hope to expand operations to the future to allow donations of computer hardware.

?Our main goal is to help the economy over in the Ukraine so we can take the money and purchase the computers over there,? says Sally. ?Hopefully this evening will broaden [the audience's] thinking of how they can further their support for the Ukraine right now because a lot of people don't want to get too politically involved in what is happening.?