

Making dreams come true, one senior at a time



By Brock Weir

She's making her list and over the next few weeks, as the holiday season starts to get into full swing, Aurora's Ingrid Davis will do better than check it twice, making sure the wishes and dreams of some very important residents in Aurora and Newmarket are well taken care of.

Ms. Davis is founder of the Aurora-Newmarket Chapter of the Senior Wish Foundation, a group devoted to making sure seniors in need are well remembered when they need it. While wishes can be as easy as simple friendship or delivering a humble turkey to put on the Christmas table, these wish lists will be very short indeed without some much needed assistance in making sure these needs and wishes are identified.

When Ms. Davis' aunt died two years ago, it was all on her to take care of her effects. That spurred her to start a business helping seniors downsize and de-clutter. It was through this business she connected with the Senior Wish Association and took it upon herself bring it to Aurora.

'It was uncharted territory,' she says. 'I didn't know where to begin. In Barrie, where it started, the culture there is different than it is here. The things they were doing with their association weren't things I would necessarily do.'

Her first step was to make inroads in local schools and make these connections between students and seniors in retirement and assisted living residences. What started off as a simple program giving students the chance to make Christmas cards for seniors at Newmarket's Southlake Village, has spawned something much greater.

'Last year, I got a phone call from a lady in Aurora and she said, 'We have nothing for Christmas.' Ms. Davis recounts of a family of a mother and unemployed son who were particularly hurting around the holiday season. 'She said, 'I am sure there are so many people who need help, but I don't know who else to talk to.' All she wanted was a turkey, so I got the turkey donated from Metro and my friends and I put baskets together with their favourite things.

'The ball got rolling, but seniors are sometimes reluctant to come out because there is a stigma attached that if they're not doing very well, they're afraid social services will come in and take them away. They don't want it to be known they are in need.'

When calls like this started to come in, Ms. Davis describes it as a 'defining moment' in what she intended to achieve, and it has only grown from there. In addition to providing a helping hand, the Seniors Wish Foundation truly lives up to its name in granting wishes for seniors. For instance, an important wish for a woman in palliative care was simply to hear the bagpipes again. They

arranged for a bagpiper in full regalia to come in and play for her and she died just a few days later.

This holiday season, the Senior Wish Foundation relies on the support of the community as a whole to make sure these wishes come true and these needs are fulfilled. This includes, she says, speaking up on behalf of local seniors in need, whether they are caregivers or family members, or seniors themselves taking that brave first step in making their voices heard, she said.

'At Christmastime, people can drop off gifts, but they can also contact me and I can call places like Cobblestone Lodge to see if they can donate their time to take somebody out for a walk, take them Christmas shopping, and there is so much they can do,' says Ms. Davis. 'I like to say that seniors need so little, but they need that little so much.'

'It doesn't mean buying them things, it means spending time talking and going for coffee. The only thing you need to be is consistent with that. You can't do it once a month or whenever you feel like it.'

She notes as time goes on, there is an interesting trend when it comes to active seniors living in retirement communities or assisted living residents when it comes to seniors who might be housebound or in nursing homes.

'What has been satisfying is these retirement places are contacting me to say, 'How can we contribute? We have a knitting club and all the knitters want to make blankets and mittens and hats for the people at the long-term care centre.' It is all going around, but what is awesome is they're starting to contact me and ask how they can help. To me, that is what it is all about.'

For more information on the Senior Wish Foundation, including how to help, and drop off locations for items, visit www.SeniorWish.org or call 905-717-0135. Donations can be dropped off at the Hollandview Trail Retirement Community (200 John West Way). This year's requests include calendars, large print books, slippers, perfume, and more.