

No Frills, Optimists fill Food Pantry's freezer, addressing food trends and needs



Clients of the Aurora Food Pantry will have some further fresh options thanks to the Joe and Val's No Frills and the Optimist Club of Aurora.

This past winter, the local grocery store on Yonge Street at Murray Drive teamed up with the Optimists for Fill the Freezer, an effort to collect hundreds of pounds of food to fill the Pantry's new walk-in freezer, all the while collecting donations from customers at the cash registers that would only further their efforts to provide for families in need.

The results of the campaign ? hundreds of pounds of freshly-frozen vegetables, fish, meat and more, not to mention a healthy infusion of cash ? were delivered to the Aurora Food Pantry on Friday afternoon by grocers Joe Cappiello and Valerie Lemoustre and a host of local Optimists.

?It's awesome to be able to give back to the people who need it and they do great work,? said Cappiello of the Food Pantry. ?There is obviously a great need for the people in the community and there's so much food that goes to waste which shouldn't go to waste.?

Aurora Food Pantry Board Chair Allison Stuart said the donation helped the food bank meet today's needs, but these needs are always fluctuating and needs might be very different tomorrow.

?By having a walk-in freezer, which is just amazing, we're able to respond to some of those fluid needs in a greater way than we were before,? she said. ?People are getting the message that we've been told many times that fresh food is good for you and it is easy to use. Clients are feeling more comfortable asking for that, and also asking for what they're used to. What did you grow up with? If you grew up and canned goods just weren't part of your diet, they're unlikely to be very attractive to you now.

?It's the look on the clients' face when we have [what they're familiar with]. Before the pandemic started, there was a new couple coming in who hadn't been here before. They were international and taking them around I saw something I couldn't read and said, ?Would this be of any interest?' The woman started to cry. I thought, ?What have I done now?' Her husband explained to me that in fact this was a really popular snack where she came from and to see it and to have it available when she was coming into the food bank for the very first time was a really important moment for her.

?We want to make more people cry in a good way!?

?Happy tears,? said Lemoustre.

Board member Maureen Casey said everyone ?deserves to have healthy food? and for the Food Pantry to be able to offer that is

something simple that will go a long way.

'Everyone deserves healthy food, not just whatever is available, regardless of where you are in life right now,' she said. 'That's something we're trying to do: we want to ensure that all products are provided, but if we can offer some additional healthy, nutritious alternatives, why shouldn't we? Health goes a long way and the pride of being able to provide quality, healthy food is just as important to us as it is for them.'

In recognition of the partnership and the donation, following the delivery the Aurora Food Pantry presented No Frills and the Optimists with a special plaque that will be given pride of place inside their place of operations on Industrial Parkway South, right next to the walk-in freezer.

'This is our way of saying thank you to No Frills and, of course, the Optimist Club, in terms of all the work that you do,' said Stuart in her presentation. 'Even when I phone you on a Friday and say, 'I need 120-dozen eggs!'

'We really feel it is important that the people in Aurora know when they donate to the Aurora Food Pantry the food is coming here and it is going out to people who are living in Aurora and north Oak Ridges who are in need. It's a matter of give where you live and supporting your neighbours.'

For more on how to support or access the Aurora Food Pantry, along with an updated list of current needs, visit aurorafoodpantry.ca.

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