

Holiday Home Tour promises to be bigger than ever on 10th anniversary



By Brock Weir

For a school that has a nearly 175-year foundation in Quaker education, a decade might just be a blip in Pickering College's history.

But a lot can happen in 10 short years, as organizers behind the annual Pickering College Holiday Home Tour can attest.

Tour organizers, homeowners, interior designers and local artisans are now hard at work putting the finishing touches on the annual event, which will include three houses in Aurora and four in Newmarket, designers from far and wide, and artisans and merchants from across York Region ? all of whom will be out for the Friday, November 21 and Saturday, November 22 tour.

?We are celebrating our 10th anniversary and we have a lot of surprises in store in every home,? says Sandra Liem of Pickering College, who is coordinating the holiday extravaganza. ?When we first started we were begging people to come on board, and now we just have so many people who want to support us I don't even know where to fit them! 10 years ago this really started off with the idea of, ?Let's just see how this goes,' knowing people are interested in home décor and such. Over the years, it has really evolved. Now, we have over 150 local businesses that are a part of it. We also have really grown our contribution to community charities.?

Since its inception in 2004, the Pickering College Holiday Home Tour has raised money for non-profits ranging from the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation, the Maternal Child Care program at Southlake Regional Health Centre, the Jennifer Ashley Children's Charity, the Literacy Council of York Region, and the Women's Centre of York Region, but this year they are focusing on the direct care of children in our local hospital.

?We want people to know that we know our responsibility is to give back and to serve society, and just how much we continue to support the community over the years,? says Ms. Liem.

While organizers place a special emphasis on the charity component of the event, they don't want to lose sight of the fact they are taking ticket-holders on a ?sensory journey? through all participating homes.

Homes are selected at the start of each year and planning truly begins in February. About 30 homes usually make the shortlist and then they are whittled down after site visits, taking into account their location, traffic flow, as well as making sure a wide variety of homes are showcased.

?We understand that with over 1,000 tour-goers, everyone comes from a different background and has a different interest in homes,? says Ms. Liem.

?We know that some people like to see subdivision homes because they are more realistic homes, we live in them, and we also have

historical homes and grand estate homes. We really try to cater to our community that way.

?Everybody loves to see the homes on Kennedy Street in Aurora with all of our more grandiose homes, and two of them are in that area this year. Each home has a different theme and different designers are going above and beyond the regular décor for the season.?

After taking a sneak peek at designers' plans, Ms. Liem confides there are prevailing trends towards ?rustic glam?, bringing the outdoors indoors and, of course, having enough ?bling? to go around.

This bling will be accentuated by two stars in the home decorating field. Friday night will include a VIP Design Tour with Cobi Ladner, past editor of Canadian House and Home Magazine, while Saturday's Seasonal Boutique and Café back at Pickering College will include a Design Talk with CITY-TV's Frankie Flowers.

?It is our 10th anniversary and we wanted to make our tours stand out from the rest,? says Ms. Liem. ?They are such leading authorities in design and décor and we know that our tour-goers really take to this and would be very interested in being a part of it.?

As designers' visions begin to take shape this month, Ms. Liem is not giving everything away. There will be plenty of surprises to go around when people come out, tickets in hand, on November 21 and 22, she says.

?We have a lot of surprises in every home; each has entertainment by local companies and different foods from various restaurants in Aurora and Newmarket,? she says. ?It is not just visually seeing the homes decorated for the holidays, but it really appeals to all your senses, whether it is smelling the food, tasting the food, or hearing the music.

?It is about going into every home and that whole sensory journey and not only visually seeing things, but being able to taste things, touch things and talk to different people. That is what I am really looking forward to.?

The 10th Anniversary Holiday Home Tour gets underway Friday, November 21 at 5.30 p.m., running through 9.30 p.m. Saturday's tour runs from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tickets are \$40 for each day. The Seasonal Boutique and Café runs Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Pickering College,