

Rise & Shine Breakfast set to rise again thanks to hefty grant



By Brock Weir

Fire this past spring proved you cannot keep Aurora's Rise & Shine Community Breakfast down for long.

Following the April 11 fire at Aurora United Church, volunteers swelled and decamped across the street to Trinity Anglican Church, less than 12 hours after the worst of the flames were extinguished, and it was business as usual for both the volunteers, and those who have come to rely on the weekly meal, barely skipping a beat.

The fire coincided with the end of the annual Rise & Shine season but next month, the breakfast is set to rise from the ashes once again next month, bigger and better than ever, thanks to a grant from the Annual Mayor's Charity Golf Classic.

This grant will not only keep the food coming into the breakfast, but also extend its season by a full seven weeks beginning Saturday, October 4 to Saturday, May 9.

“For the church and congregation, I think there is an even greater commitment than there was before to give back to our community,” says Rise & Shine coordinator Carol Lever. “The community has been really gracious to us throughout this period. We are in a time of transition and people are opening up their arms to us. This grant is coming our way, Trinity is partnering with us, [and people still call] asking how they can help and volunteer.”

There are plenty of opportunities to volunteer and lend a hand for the weekly breakfast, whether you are a dab hand in the kitchen or even a high school student looking to get some community service hours under your belt. Those interested in volunteering for the organization are invited to a special volunteer information session on Saturday, September 20, at 10 a.m. at Trinity Anglican Church.

“It is welcome to anyone who wants to lend a hand, but it is a commitment of one Saturday a month for eight months because we have four teams,” Ms. Lever explains. “We welcome students doing the community service hours, but they do need to be high school students and above.”

In the morning following the fire, the church hall at Trinity was overflowing with volunteers looking to serve up a hot meal for those in need.

In their grant application, Ms. Lever spoke about the need to do some electrical upgrades in the hall, to accommodate some of their more power-taxing appliances such as their conveyor toaster, but also stressing the importance of food programs run by local faith communities, including their own, Welcome Table, and Martha's Table, which are operated out of Trinity and St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church respectfully.

“The Region of York identifies that 12.7 per cent of people in the Region have a low income and families struggle and need a little bit of assistance in putting food on the table, or even helping them make ends meet,” says Ms. Lever. “We are honoured as a church to be able to play a role in improving access to healthy food and nutrition in our community, but we are also providing more than that through Rise and Shine because it is a safe and really welcoming place for people to come on a Saturday morning to meet new friends in the community.”

In hindsight, Ms. Lever says that, as unusual as it sounds, the Aurora United Church fire might have strengthened their program, particularly the community's commitment to their breakfast program as well as highlighting the importance of community food programs to the public at large. To this end, Ms. Lever says she anticipates their numbers will grow in the upcoming season.

“I think people will see it as more than just a food program and we really want that to happen,” she says. “People who are financially in need are, of course, welcome at Rise and Shine but so are other people who just want the fellowship, people who just want to meet others in their community. This isn't just about financial need, it is about community.”

Anyone looking to lend a hand is invited to contact Ms. Lever at aucrisenshine@gmail.com. Financial donations are always welcome, she says, as is help from local businesses willing to give them a break in food and grocery costs. Much was lost in the fire and Rise & Shine is also looking for a donation of a “gently used” refrigerator that will help keep the program going, that is still relatively new to be compatible with recently completed wiring work.