

Salvation Army development to finally begin this winter



By Brock Weir

As the Salvation Army prepares to launch its annual Christmas Kettle campaign, the Northridge Community Church ? the hub of Salvation Army's Central York Region operations ? is eyeing a long-awaited trip south.

They are not, of course, longing to be snowbirds but after several years of delays and false starts, the recent sale of their Newmarket offices now means it is full steam ahead in constructing their new, multi-phase headquarters in Aurora.

?We're so pleased to finally announce that our building in Newmarket has been sold,? says Major Brian Bishop of Salvation Army's Central York Region operations, which serves Aurora, Newmarket, and East Gwillimbury, with some outreach to King, Whitchurch-Stouffville and Bradford. ?The purchaser took over as of September and we have engaged into a full year's lease with them. Our hope, our plan and our prayer is depending upon the winter and some of the other elements we have to continue to finalize, we'll be in a position either in the late winter or early spring to put shovel in the ground and officially start developing.?

Northridge will build their new community hub on the west side of Leslie Street, just north of the Wellington Street East intersection on the edge of the incoming 2C Development.

If all goes according to plan, they are anticipating a construction period between 10 and 12 months. The facility will be built in two phases, with the first being the most extensive.

?Phase One of our facility will have a senior high school-size gymnasium,? Bishop explains. ?It is going to be able to accommodate the needs of what the youth in the greater Central York Region are going to require, particularly the youth in Aurora.?

As the building will be build adjacent to the existing Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex, pedestrian access between the two facilities is planned so they can work hand in hand, depending on the needs of the Town. Further dialogue is needed, however, between the Salvation Army and the Town to see where those partnership opportunities lie, adds Bishop.

?We are anxious to be able to develop that partnership further,? says Bishop, noting resources planned to be on site that go well beyond ministering. ?There is going to be a community kitchen format called the Tim Horton's Community Kitchen, as they were gracious donors to our capital campaign. We also recognize the needs of seniors. One of the top three needs in York Region itself is loneliness and, as our senior population continues to grow, that need is only going to continue to grow. We're hoping that this facility will also create opportunities for some social interaction amongst seniors in our community as well.

?This is designed to be a place where people can meet and greet, a place where people can come for some needs, a place where people can be a part of that community with their friends and neighbours.?

Officials are meeting this Thursday to finalize the drawings of the building, ensure they can streamline the construction process to avoid last minute changes, and brainstorm further needs the building can address while anticipating for the future.

The meeting comes at a very busy time of year for the Salvation Army as they not only gear up for the Kettle Campaign, but upping their presence in the community through various holiday parades, including this Saturday's Santa Under The Stars here in Aurora.

Their presence serves not only to add to the festive spirit of the season, but to highlight the evolving needs of the community and raise the necessary funds in order to address them.

According to Mr. Bishop, the Salvation Army of Central York Region supported approximately 950 families during the season, a significant increase from previous years as they were now working in a deeper partnership with the Aurora Lions Club. This is a partnership that is due to continue this year and, as such, Bishop says they are not anticipating community needs to be any less. And, with community growth, these needs have nowhere to go but up.

?We're noticing the needs of the people are shifting,? says Bishop above those practical, perennial needs of food and clothing. ?There are a lot of hurting people in our world today, a lot of hurting families, adults, moms, dads and children. With some of the separation that is going on, the dysfunctional families, the breaking down of families, that is creating a lot of different kinds of needs out there.?

Working with such organizations as the Homelessness Prevention Program of York Region, and rent banks, resources are now at hand for the Salvation Army to help keep people housed, often in their own homes, retaining a sense of dignity.

?We're finding too, anger management, people with grief, people who are battling emotional illness, are a growing reality today,? he adds. ?Our recovery and support programs are on the rise. There is probably more that we can do and we just really don't have the facilities to be able to accommodate that, hence the reason why we are moving to Wellington and Leslie. It will be a much larger facility to be able to serve our community in a holistic fashion.

?This is the Salvation Army and we serve the body, the mind and the soul. We're a spiritually driven movement, not that one's faith is a prerequisite to serve them, but it certainly motivates us to do what we do.?