

Seniors' Centre celebrates milestone 20 years in John West Way home



Despite the blustery winter weather, the Aurora Seniors' Centre was an oasis of warmth on January 21 as members and special guests came together to mark the 20th anniversary of their home on John West Way, which has become one of the Town's busiest hubs.

Glen Sharp, President of the Aurora Seniors' Association, said when he saw the weather that morning he expected an intimate gathering of about five or six to us, but, in a testament to the importance in which members hold the facility, more than 200 packed the building for the celebration.

"It is truly an honour to be here today as we celebrate a very special milestone," said Mayor Tom Mrakas. "For two decades, this Centre has been a cornerstone of our community; a place where people come together, not just for programs, but for connection, friendships, and belonging, and that's something we're celebrating.

"I also want to recognize the Aurora Seniors' Association, whose leadership, commitment, and partnership with the Town has been absolutely instrumental in the success of this Centre. Your dedication has helped ensure that this space continues to thrive [and] evolve to meet the needs of our seniors."

Mayor Mrakas underscored this point by highlighting the contributions of countless volunteers and mentioning several members of municipal staff who have also contributed to the Centre's success, with special mention to the Town's long-time Adult Program Coordinator, Karie Papillion, who now holds another position within the municipality, for "helping build the strong foundation that we continue to benefit from today."

"The Centre has always been more than just a building - it's a place where friendships are formed, where people stay active and curious, where laughter is shared, and where no one has to feel alone. That sense of community and connection is invaluable and it matters just as much today as it did 20 years ago," he continued. "As Mayor, I can't say how proud I am of the role that this Centre plays in making Aurora such a caring, inclusive, and welcoming place to live at every stage of life.

"Congratulations to everyone who has been a part of this incredible journey, past and present, and to many more years of connection, activity, and community ahead."

One person who was there at the start of that "incredible journey" was former mayor Tim Jones, who took time out of his own

birthday to celebrate the Centre's.

Jones said the creation of the Aurora Seniors Centre is one of 'the biggest feathers in my cap' as Mayor.

'I am so proud,' said Jones, noting he worked hand-in-hand with former Aurora Seniors' Association president Charles Sequeira and his board to make the vision a reality. 'I can't be more proud of the way it's developed, it's grown, and it's enhanced.'

The history of the Aurora Seniors' Centre dates back to the 1960s when sorority sisters formed what was then called The Friendship Circle, identifying a community need and coming together to fill the gap.

By the time the idea for today's Aurora Seniors' Centre was conceived, they had a membership that was approximately 400 members, and a further 200 had joined up by the time the present building opened just across the parking lot from Town Hall in 2006.

In his remarks, Sharp paid tribute to the contributions of his predecessors at the helm.

'Without [Charles Sequeira] this place might not be here,' said Sharp. 'Not only was he involved in pushing Council and pushing Mayor Jones to get this building built, I understand he was actually involved in the design, so Charles worked tirelessly to make this place happen. Charles, from everybody here, thank you for making this place possible.'

'Jim Abram' is a strong advocate for older adults and works with politicians looking for opportunities for us, looking for grants, looking for ways that we can improve the Centre. Jim, again, thank you on behalf of the membership. If you haven't seen Carol Hedenberg around the Centre, you're just not coming to the Centre. Carol was a Board member, a President, and she's involved in so many things around the Centre and does it kind of anonymously most of the time. She was behind most of what's happened today, so thank you, Carol, for everything you continue to do.'

Past president Dave Legallais was also mentioned for his very important work in steering the Centre through all the challenges of the Global Pandemic.

'It's a centre, it's our community, and when you come in you feel warm, you feel safe, and you feel welcome,' said Sharp. 'I've been to a couple of other centres, and I'm not going to name names, but it doesn't have the same feel. We've got a different feel here partly because there are so many volunteers who all want to be here.'

'This is a special place, and obviously you all agree with that or you wouldn't be here today. Once again, from the Board, from the Staff, from the Mayor, from former mayor Jones, and from the bottom of my heart, thank you all for coming out today.'

By Brock Weir
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