

Coldest Night runs again

By Eric Schmiedl

They're back and they're looking for more.

This is the second year for the Coldest Night of the Year (CNOY) Woodstock fundraiser and Scott McKague, Woodstock event director, is optimistic the event can raise \$100,000. Similar fundraisers are being held across Canada and the local one is in support of Operation Sharing's The Inn homeless shelter, which runs daily starting at 7:30 p.m. at Old St. Paul's Anglican Church. Operation Sharing extended its thanks to the church for its Inn efforts.

"I do feel pretty confident it (the \$100,000) is doable," McKague said, adding that in the first year more than \$82,000 was raised. The event this year is being held Feb. 26 with teams gathering at the Inn at 4 p.m.

The CNOY fundraiser went ahead as a virtual event in 2021 due to COVID-19. The aim this time around is to do it as an actual mass walk, with two and five-kilometre routes.

The event is designed to raise funds and awareness surrounding homelessness.



Scott McKague tries on a Coldest Night toque.

"People are becoming more aware of the homeless situation," McKague said.

There are a number of volunteers already on board, including some from Operation Sharing, and Operation Sharing's Bullwinkle's Eatery is supplying food for the local event.

Cambridge-based Logikor is the lead corporate sponsor and has already contributed \$5,000 to the cause.

CNOY began in 2011 and McKague walked in the Kitchener Coldest Night for several years before helming the Woodstock walk.

Christmas Place another success

The Christmas Place, Operation Sharing's longest-running program, made a definite impact this past Yule season.

The program served 325 families including 781

children, said coordinator Kathy Gardiner. And that doesn't include those who were served after the Dec. 13-16 pickup of gifts at College Avenue

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Christmas Place another success

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United Church – thanks go out to College Avenue for providing the venue.

“We left any gifts we had left over at the church.”

This pickup was later than usual for the program and “I think that worked well.” In the past, with the earlier dates, the Christmas Place would receive a “tidal wave” of donations after the pickup. “It just worked out better.”

Heart FM and 15 companies contributed gift cards and gifts for the cause. And volunteers were vital.

“We probably had 20 or 24 volunteers. (In 2020),

we had about 10 ... it was very busy.” The volunteer numbers, that “easily” topped 100 in pre-COVID-19 times, were lower due to the coronavirus, Gardiner said.

“We are hoping (at some point in the future) to go back to the original model of (the) Christmas Place ... shopping for gifts by parents, grandparents, and kids. I would love to go back to that.” COVID has changed that for now, and the goal is to keep everyone safe, Gardiner said. The program ran in partnership with the Power of Hope and the Children’s Aid Society of Oxford County.

A look at an innovative program

Operation Sharing’s Food for Friends program has a rich history dating back more than a decade.

The program has been recognized with back-to-back national awards and has been praised in the Canadian House of Commons by Oxford’s Member of Parliament, according to the Operation Sharing files.

Essentially, the concept is simple. People donate money at the tills, often asked to do so by supermarket cashiers. That money goes into a

central fund and people in need of financial help are then issued their food cards.

The cards have multiple benefits. They provide people with improved dignity over traditional food banks, as well as the ability to choose what groceries they want.

In Woodstock, people can use the cards at Foodland, Sobeys, Food Basics, and Giant Tiger. In Ingersoll, people can shop at Foodland, Giant Tiger, and the Independent store.

Search continues for volunteers, participants of Extended Family

Operation Sharing’s Extended Family Project is searching for additional volunteers and participants.

The program has several volunteers who are offering tutoring in Math and English for students up to Grade 11, said Eric Schmiedl, coordinator of Extended Family.

A mix of face-to-face tutoring, as well as tutoring through Zoom, is being offered.

Prospective volunteers (and not just tutors) and participants who wish to take part can email Schmiedl at eric Schmiedl@yahoo.ca or call 519-539-5926.

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Bullwinkle's is 'meeting a need'

By Eric Schmiedl

Operation Sharing's Bullwinkle's Eatery is hitting the spot in more ways than one.

"I feel we are meeting a need in the community. The need seems to be growing," said John R. Smith, Bullwinkle's coordinator.

The eatery began several years ago and has occupied spots at the Moose Family Centre and Indwell's Harvey Woods facility on Vansittart Avenue. The COVID-19 pandemic prompted the move to the eatery's current quarters at Woodstock's College Avenue United Church.

Bullwinkle's averages about 40 to 45 people at the door per day Tuesday to Thursday for noon-hour lunch, not including 10 meals a week for Transition House. The eatery also supplies meals several days a week to Operation Sharing's Inn homeless shelter.

"There's always a soup, and it varies. It could be broccoli, or cauliflower, or squash," Smith said. There is always an entrée that could be something like quiche, casserole, pork chops, or meat loaf, as examples. A salad, such as coleslaw, green, or bean, is included. There is also dessert that could include cookies, cake, banana loaf, or muffins.

"We try to be middle of the road ... we don't do highly-spiced stuff. We don't use a whole lot of spices. Generally speaking, we go easy on salt and the more intense herbs and spices. People seem to be very happy with what they're getting."

The menu "absolutely depends on what we have on hand," Smith said. The eatery is funded largely through the County of Oxford although much of it works on food donations as well from various entities in the community.



The Bullwinkle's Eatery crew includes (seated) Tilly Van Dersar (back row, left to right) Kathy Stephenson, Judi Brown, Natasha Hoogkamp, Marilyn Schmiedl, and John R. Smith.

As for the people who come for meals, "it's largely by freewill donation," and if people can afford to pay for their meal, that's fine, Smith said.

"It's all takeout, absolutely. It's absolutely (because of COVID). I hope to return to limited indoor dining at some point," Smith said, noting the social aspect of that.

It's more than just an "anonymous soup kitchen," with those working at Bullwinkle's familiar with the patrons. There are several volunteers and participants at the eatery.

"The volunteers are really the foundation ... the rock ... for this. They're the culinary equivalent of front-line workers. I'm grateful to have such dedicated, capable people to work with. I'm also incredibly grateful to the donors. It makes our work possible."

The long-term hope is, in Smith's "personal take," to keep Bullwinkle's at the church. "The kitchen facilities there are excellent. We couldn't ask for a better kitchen. And (the eatery) is relatively accessible in the city."

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End of an Operation Sharing era

After 26 years at the helm of Operation Sharing, Stephen Giuliano is calling it a day.

The chaplain/executive director of the organization, Giuliano retired effective Nov. 26.

“I couldn’t have asked for a better organization to serve for over these many years than Operation Sharing, supporting the less fortunate countywide. It has truly been an honour,” he said.

“Although I am looking forward to retirement, I know I will miss my staff, board, volunteers, and patrons, many of whom have become my good friends. Yet having said that, I am also very confident knowing they will continue on in



Stephen Giuliano

tremendously valuable ways with Operation Sharing’s future.

“There are so many within the community that I would like to thank in supporting my ministry and the organization. Suffice it to say that the Oxford County community has been wonderful in its support of my and our ongoing efforts within the organization. Thank you all,” Giuliano said.

Marilyn Schmiedl, Operation Sharing board president, said: “On behalf of the board, staff and volunteers at Operation Sharing I would like to thank Stephen for his 26 years of service not only to our organization but to our community. He has been in the forefront of Operation Sharing since its humble beginnings.”

Molly the pug

My name is Molly, I am a pug you know.
I am only four months old and have some time to grow.

I keep my Mama busy, with biting, running, playing and driving all the dogs crazy with my playful ways.

I am adorable just wanted you to know, I won’t always be a puppy, so take time to enjoy!

— *Poem by Tara Myers, Writers’ Café participant*

Bullwinkle's

WOODSTOCK – Running out of College Avenue United Church, takeout lunches are available on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday (from

noon to 1 p.m.) at the Bullwinkle’s Eatery.

People are asked to make a freewill donation.

Food for Friends

OXFORD COUNTY – Please

remember to contribute each time you shop at supporting grocery stores in Woodstock and Ingersoll through the year.

Your support is much appreciated.

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