

Aurora Lions Club celebrates 80 years of community service



The Aurora Lions Club has never shied away from a challenge ? whether it is providing vision services for youngsters or helping to make the holidays extra merry for local families in need ? and now they are celebrating 80 years of making a tangible difference in the community.

The local branch of the Lions roared as one this month at the Aurora Soccer Club at a special luncheon to mark their milestone anniversary.

Attended by several local dignitaries, including Newmarket-Aurora MP Tony Van Bynen, Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MPP Michael Parsa and Mayor Tom Mrakas, it was a time not only for looking back at past successes but also for looking forward.

The Association of Lions Clubs was first founded in the United States in 1917. Establishing its roots in Canada in Windsor, ON, in 1920, it took just four years for the club to reach Aurora.

Lions International now has a presence in more than 200 countries and regions around the world, with 49,000 individual clubs shouldering the responsibilities they have taken on as a whole.

The mission of Lions International is simple: ?to improve health and wellbeing, strengthen communities, and support those in need through humanitarian service and grants that impact lives globally, and encourage peace and international understanding.?

?When I was doing the Christmas program, people would come up to me and say, ?When we were young, we had to go and get help from the Lions and I would like to give you \$100 now because I don't need it anymore,? says Lion Jim Bondy, a long-time member of the local club alongside wife Michelle.

Adds Michelle: ?Their families, when they were younger, were helped by the Lions, so they would like to pay back now.?

The Bondys look back fondly on the numerous Lions-led campaigns they've been a part of over the decades, including both the Christmas drive and the vision programs.

It's the dedication of the Lions that really keep the club going," says Jim.

Michelle notes that 12 or 13 members are the most active and, overall, the current "pride" of Lions is a "really good group."

This is a sentiment shared by Jack Bentley, a life-member of the Aurora Lions Club who first joined up more than 40 years ago.

"I'd been living in Aurora and area and the Aurora community treated me well," says Bentley. "I felt it was time to give back a little and felt the Lions was a good way to do it. Along the way, I met some fantastic people in the club who I really respect and it was an honour to work there with them."

Among those he felt deserved special mention were Lions Don and Cathy Lewis, Trudy Stunden, Stu Barfitt, Earl Stewart, Bud Gilbert and Don Glass "they were a pleasure to work beside and do things with and would do anything for anybody."

Bentley says he's enjoyed both the service aspect of the club as well as the fellowship it's offered.

"It was just an honour to be there and do the things they have done to help the needy," says Bentley, who now lives in the Muskoka region. "If anyone needed anything, [residents] could always go and call the Aurora Lions Club and they were always there to help. If something came up, there was always somebody there to help."

When he first joined, it was an era when employers encouraged their staff to suss out local service clubs "such as the Lions, Rotary, and Optimists" and join up to serve the community as a condition of their work. Those days are long gone, but this foundation of good works has sustained local service clubs in the decades since.

"It's great that it is still going and they can still hold it together," says Bentley. "We have gone through ups and downs with the clubs with personalities, and it's nice to know it is still operating and doing a good job. It feels good to do something in the community and help out."

For more information on the Aurora Lions Club, visit e-clubhouse.org/sites/auroraon/contact.php. For more on Lions International and their mission, visit lionsclubs.org.

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