

Remembering "Mr. Christmas Basket"



By Brock Weir

Tributes have been coming in to remember Fred Bullen, past president of the Aurora Lions Club, who died at Southlake Regional Health Centre just before Easter.

Mr. Bullen, who was a member of the Lions for over 30 years, was instrumental in many of their key initiatives, including youth initiatives, campaigns for eye health, and the annual Christmas Basket drive which has gone on since its inception to help countless hundreds of needy and disadvantaged families in the Aurora and surrounding area since.

Often spearheaded together with his wife, Pam, and their family, they emphasized the continual need for such a program in the community.

"He was, beyond a doubt, the hardest working Lion I had ever met," recalls Norm Weller, a member of the Aurora Lions since 1962, and former municipal councillor. "It didn't matter how long the list for Christmas baskets was, he made sure everyone got a basket. Nobody could surpass him in that.

"He was 'Mr. Christmas Basket' and he was there for everything and it didn't matter how much work was there or how much it cost him, he was there. People have no idea the effort it takes for the Christmas baskets."

Last year's endeavours reached over 200 families and the team worked to address the growing need for gifts for teens. Speaking to The Auroran last year, the Bullens underscored this growth in need but said aside from the regular donations of food and toys, there was a real dearth in gifts for kids 12 - 18 such as movie passes and restaurant gift cards. They worked hard to fill that gap last year and was something they said they would continue to do in the future.

"The Christmas Basket drive was always a thing that was very close to him," recalls Brad Snell, past president of the Lions, who was acting president during Mr. Bullen's illness. "He thought it was very necessary to help the community in raising awareness of people who weren't as fortunate as others at Christmastime through helping them with toys and food. He helped them see Christmas in a different light for people who couldn't afford it.

"He was committed every year to getting the volunteers and getting the organizations to grant them food and get the whole ball rolling not only in getting people out there but helping them to sort out the food. He had the list through the Aurora Food Pantry of who needed it the most and organized the people to get it there."

A service was held last Tuesday for Mr. Bullen. In lieu of flowers, his family has asked for donations in his name to the Lions Club's Camp Kirk Foundation and the Southlake Regional Health Centre Foundation.