

## Local 'icon' Diane Zahodnik celebrated for years of volunteer work



By Julia Lloyd

An icon in the Orangeville community celebrated her retirement on Sunday (June 30) while surrounded by friends and family.

Diane Zahodnik has been a part of the Town of Orangeville for decades. Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones and a representative for Mayor Sandy Brown came to celebrate Diane's retirement and present a certificate of recognition as a community volunteer.

'I fell in love with this community because I felt it was very family-oriented and there is something to do in Orangeville for every age group,' Diane said.

The retirement celebration took place at New Hope Church in Orangeville. The room was packed with people laughing and smiling. Diane had requested that those who came to celebrate with her should bring one item to donate to the food bank.

Even when it's her retirement party, she's still giving back.

Diane finished her real estate career at iProReality Ltd., and she was presented with a certificate recognizing 33 years of success in the business.

Just by looking at her you could see she was full of compassion. Her story is something of inspiration for many women because she didn't live an easy life, but manages to put a smile on someone's face at least once a day.

Ms. Zahodnik has spent time volunteering with more organizations than she can remember over the past three decades, however, she says there are two volunteering accomplishments that stick out in her mind.

On her father's side, out of 13 family members, nine passed away due to Lymphoma. This really motivated Diane to get involved in any way she could with the Lymphoma Leukemia Society (LLS) of Ontario. She was one of the first 12 trained at the Princess Margaret Lymphoma Society to take calls all over Canada, to give people hope by speaking with a survivor.

Diane herself is a survivor of Lymphoma and she helped volunteer at LLS for 10 years.

Another charity she volunteered with and has so much passion towards is the Sunrise Centre for victims of sexual assault or domestic abuse at Headwaters Health Care Centre, which helps women, men and children who suffered abuse.

The woman who made the centre possible was the late Ronnie Ingles, who created the centre in 1991.

Debbie Sherwood, a family friend and Orangeville Councillor, said of Diane: "She was a firecracker."

Diane unfortunately had experienced domestic abuse from afar. Her sister having passed at age 42 due to the abuse she had suffered.

This event in Diane's life made her passionate about keeping the Orangeville community safe. And so, Diane was one of the people who helped fundraise for the Sunrise Centre.

Diane was born in Alliston Hospital but grew up in Toronto. When she met her husband Mel, they ended up moving into a house in Mississauga. But, since 1997 they have lived on Colburn Crescent in New Tecumseth.

Mel and Diane met through their shared passion for the accordion. They met while both playing in a band when they were 15 and 18 and have now been married for 54 years.

"Someone once asked me, 'what's my secret?' and I just told them, don't go to bed angry," she said.

Pauline Blanchard, one of Diane's friends who joined her at her retirement party, said everyone in town knows Diane, but the town also knows her husband Mel, really well.

"Everyone loves Mel," said Blanchard.

Mel was VP of Orangeville Skating and was a skate sharpener for 33 years in the town.

"He has met so many people from the time they were little kids to when they brought their kids in years later," explained Diane.

In the real-estate business for 32 years and a very popular real estate agent, she started her career at Family Trust in Brampton,

She then started working for Royal City Realty and did well there. When she was working there she was poached by RE/MAX in Orangeville.

"When you have been a successful person, everyone wants you and that is the way it goes and they wanted to be manager of the office and that's what took me there," explained Diane.

After a few years, Diane felt she needed to find somewhere else to work and found iProRealty Ltd. in Brampton and has been a part of their team until her retirement.

It is clear just by spending a few minutes with Diane why she is so loved by her community. Icons like her don't come around often.