

Habitat for Humanity's ReStore enjoying brisk business locally

By Tabitha Wells - Although Orangeville's Habitat for Humanity ReStore has been open less than five months, they have seen record sales and involvement from the community.

The store, the second largest in the region behind the flagship store in Guelph, has grown in popularity exponentially since its opening.

"The Orangeville ReStore is quickly coming very close to meeting Guelph's levels," said Sharron Riley-Persson, Director of Marketing, Communications & Resource Development at Habitat for Humanity Wellington Dufferin Guelph.

"We have exceeded our budget every month and we just love Orangeville, and we love the people here."

She added that a large part of the success has to be attributed to the volunteers, as they are key in making sure that the store (and other Habitat for Humanity initiatives) are able to run as smoothly and well as possible.

"Volunteers are our life-blood, there is no way around that," she said.

"We could not operate our ReStores and we could not build on our build sites without the wonderful talents and time the volunteers give us."

The positions available for volunteers work for a variety of age groups and people, providing a broad experience for anyone looking to volunteer for any generation. There are opportunities for retirees (including youth mentoring positions) as well as opportunities for unemployed graduates to enhance their resume and references and high school students looking to complete their 40 hours of community service.

Along with opportunities learning merchandising, retail pricing, cash-work and customer service, volunteers also have the chance to get involved and learn about Habitat's environmental programs, such as e-waste and recycling, and see what things look like from the administrative and board end for planning and execution.

"As you know, we have a thriving e-waste program, so they get involved in environmental initiatives as well," said Ms. Riley-Persson.

"They'll learn how e-waste recycling happens and what is a part of that. In one case, someone who was a student at the time went on to environmental studies because of the exposure he had to our e-waste and recycling program."

Part of the draw to the volunteer program for many is what Habitat for Humanity stands for and does through their programs. One of the Orangeville ReStore's current volunteers, Orangeville District Secondary School student Cole Salo, was led to the program by his need to provide community service, but it was what they do that made him want to choose the ReStore.

"My mom pointed it out to me as a place that's simple to get involved with for my volunteer hours," Cole said. "When I found out what they do and what they are all about, I thought it would be an incredible place to work."

There is also a volunteer program that assists at-risk youth and helps them, along with the other volunteers become more connected with the community of Orangeville. And, according to Ms. Riley-Persson it's that connection and the dedication of the volunteers that help drive the store's popularity.

"It's about how the volunteers greet people as well and the fact that you get happy, smiling customers whenever they are greeted by happy, smiling people," she said. "Our volunteers are all so committed to us and enthusiastic because it's a fun experience as well."

She added that she hopes that Orangeville begins to view the Habitat ReStore as a retail destination of choice, before heading to other stores in town.

“What we're trying to do is make sure that Orangeville thinks about our retail store before they go to any other retail shop,” she said. “Our product changes so often, and as you can see we have such wonderful variety and selection, and the sales help benefit the community and the people who live here.”

The volunteer hours are flexible so that they have the option of working shifts that work around their lives. Currently, the ReStore has three dedicated volunteers, but is in search of more.

“It's just wonderful for the community, and it provides the volunteers with a stronger connection to their community,” said Ms. Riley-Persson. “Ultimately by being involved in an organization that's so community focused, it's a win-win for the community, the volunteers and for Habitat.”

Anyone interested in becoming a volunteer at the ReStore or for any of the Habitat for Humanity programs can contact Nancy Frazer, Associate Director of Volunteer Services by email at nancy@habitatwdg.ca.