

Rotary Club of Orangeville marks 80th anniversary in the community



By Mike Pickford

One of the area's oldest, most respected service clubs celebrated an incredible milestone this week, welcoming more than 200 guests from the local community to join them in doing so.

The Rotary Club of Orangeville has a distinguished record of lending a helping hand to any and all who need it that dates back to 1937. On Tuesday evening, the group, which today boasts 30 dedicated members, hosted a celebratory banquet at the Orangeville Agricultural Event Centre to reflect on 80 years of Rotary in the community.

The evening kicked off with a special meet-and-greet reception so guests could familiarize themselves with one another and learn about what it means to be a Rotarian from attending members. Several dignitaries were on hand to present special anniversary plaques and pass along congratulations on behalf of their communities and constituency to the local club.

Sylvia Jones, MPP for Dufferin-Caledon, said it was an "honour" for her to recognize club's 80th anniversary, commending each of its members for all the good work they do in the area.

"I think it's invaluable what Rotarians do in our communities, the evidence is there for all to see," Ms. Jones said. "I see it everywhere I go throughout the riding, but to me it's this level of voluntarism, this ability and desire to give back that, quite frankly, makes our community unique and special."

She added, "I'm so proud to recognize our local Rotary Club as it celebrates this incredible 80-year milestone. All the different Rotary projects, fundraisers and events held locally continue to enhance the quality of life for youth, seniors and families in the area. Thank you for your commitment and generosity. Thank you for making a difference."

Mayor Jeremy Williams presented Rotary members with a special award commemorating the organization's "extraordinary" history in town.

"Eighty years, that is really quite phenomenal," Mayor Williams said. "That year King George VI was reigning over Canada, William Lyon Mackenzie King was our Prime Minister. So much has happened over that 80-year period and yet, the Rotary Club of Orangeville has stood. I'm so proud that Rotary is a part of our community. Someone asked me earlier what Rotary meant to me and I answered, 'It's a unique bond between everyone in Rotary and the greater community working together'. That, I think, is fantastic." He concluded, "Here's hoping the Rotary wheel keeps spinning for 180 more years in Orangeville! Well done."

Long-time Rotary member Bob Burnside gave an interesting speech on the history of the club in Orangeville, covering everything from the organization's Charter Night on April 19, 1937 to the present day. He noted the club has a long history of hosting and sponsoring community favourites "both past and present" with events such as the popular Beef BBQ Days operated between 1961 and 1974, the Lord Dufferin Horse Show from 1971 to 1977 and the Orangeville Rotary Ribfest, started in 2010 and still going strong today, as particular highlights.

Mr. Burnside also noted the legacy the Orangeville club has created over the years, having sponsored and encouraged Rotary clubs to spring up in Shelburne, Brampton and Orangeville Highlands. He also noted the group has partnered with several community entities and organizations on projects such as the construction of Rotary Park in the 1980s, the Fendley Park Splash Pad in 2010 and renovations to the Orangeville Public Library between 1984 and 1987.

"Rotary was a success doing most of the things it did, and we had fun doing most of them," Mr. Burnside said.

Capping off the night, keynote speaker John Stairs, Vice President of the Rotary Foundation of Canada, passed along his personal

congratulations to the Orangeville club while also sharing his thoughts on what it meant to be a Rotarian. Entertainment was provided by local folk musical group Rhythmfoot, made up by Frank and Chanda Leahy and five of their six children. Speaking to the Citizen following the anniversary gala, Knut Holmsen, chair of the event's organizing committee and long-time Rotarian himself, said he was pleased with how the night panned out.

'It was a fantastic evening, I particularly enjoyed the reflections from Bob Burnside on the history of the club. I found that quite fun and interesting,' Mr. Holmsen said. 'I think that was the main thing I will be taking away from the evening - the reflection of how life and society itself has changed over the course of that 80-year period, yet the Rotary club's values have remained the same.'

Mr. Holmsen pointed to the long-standing Rotary International (this year celebrating its 100th anniversary) four-way test, which Rotarians try to apply to all they say and do.

'Before we do anything, we ask 'is it the truth?' 'Is it fair to all concerned?' 'Will it build goodwill and better friendships?' And 'will it be beneficial to all concerned?'' Mr. Holmsen said.

'That is what's important to me. That our core beliefs have survived all the variety of changes in society. This evening was a good time to reflect on that.'

Mr. Holmsen said all proceeds raised through ticket sales and other donations at the gala will go toward helping Rotary eradicate polio from the world, as the club will be making a contribution to Polio Plus once the money has been counted.

'There's no indication yet regarding how much we managed to raise, but, with the incredible support of the public, we're hoping there will be a worthwhile donation made,' Mr. Holmsen said. 'That would cap off a wonderful evening. It was a great event for everyone being able to get together and revisit old friendships and enjoy an evening together. To be able to do something so positive at the end would be an added bonus.'

For more information on the Rotary Club of Orangeville, visit orangevillerotary.ca.