

Murder mystery dinner exceeds \$7,500 target for Autism support

By Marni Walsh

A fundraising campaign born out of a grandmother's love for her twin grandchildren with autism has become an annual event that is surpassing all financial targets. Deanna Avison of Shelburne teamed up with Megan Young of the Shelburne Golf and Country Club for the second year in a row, besting her goal of \$7500 by raising over \$9064 at the "Hearts Wide Open for Autism" murder mystery dinner and silent auction event on April 1st.

The grandmother says she is "driven by love to be a voice for children who face the challenges of living on the spectrum." She spear-headed "Hearts Wide Open for Autism" in 2016 to raise funds for special needs students under the umbrella of the Upper Grand Learning Foundation.

Guests at the event enjoyed a delicious dinner, browsed silent auction tables, and enjoyed "Murder for Hire," an interactive performance company out of Kitchener-Waterloo. The troupe of comedy performers returned again this year to present their new show: A Fright to Remember as the evening's entertainment.

Deanna Avison says the troupe was "amazing, and everyone raved about the entertainment, the absolutely delicious meal, and the gorgeous venue. It was an all round wonderful evening filled with lots of laughter."

She says statistics show one in 68 children are diagnosed with autism, with no two children on the spectrum the same. Autism comes in various forms, mild, moderate and severe; some children are non verbal, leading to great communication difficulties. The determined Grandmother says, "There are a substantial number of children in the community with autism, and other special needs, that will benefit from the funds raised through this event. The funds help "supply essential tools and other necessary items the children need to help them through their day at school," she says. "With our growing community, the number of children with special needs is only going to increase."

Ms. Avison says she personally viewed purchases from last year's fund raising efforts and was amazed at the number of items the money provided for the children. "It touched my heart so much to see what the community helped do," says Ms. Avison "and the difference we made for children to have the necessary tools they need in order to help them through their day at school." Money raised this year will go even further to help those kids in local schools.

The "autism grandma" sends out a big thank you to everyone who sponsored and supported the event and opened their hearts to make the fundraiser such a huge success. She says the event will return next year, "so be sure to save the date: Saturday, April 7, 2018.