

Community bands together in clock tower Poppy Project

By **JAMES MATTHEWS, LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER**

Remembrance Day poppies have blossomed on the old Orangeville clock tower.

It's part of local public library's Poppy Project. Hand-crafted poppies are attached to four panels that adorn the clock tower.

More than 3,300 cloth poppies, some crocheted and others knitted, have been used in the project to mark Remembrance Day.

Community groups and individuals have been involved in the project that began when Orangeville volunteer Laura Austin approached town council in January.

A friend of hers lives in Stouffville where they covered their clock tower with cloth poppies. She thought it'd be a dandy idea to see Orangeville's clock tower cloaked in the red of knitted and stitched and crocheted poppies.

The Royal Canadian Legion Branch 233 blessed the initiative in May and Austin said the project took off.

"It was very grassroots, kind of an organic-type process," Austin said. "I certainly didn't create the idea. Lots of different communities ... do it."

A testament to its popularity is in the many volunteers who came forward to get the plan off the ground locally, she said.

"All of them (fabric poppies) are little pieces of art," she said. "They're gorgeous."

Austin said she's had many years of involvement with various community groups. And, given the calibre of people she's volunteered with over about 30 years, she isn't surprised by the support the Orangeville Poppy Project has garnered.

"I understand how the community operates. Our new branding 'Love, Orangeville' is so perfect because that's really what it's like.

"There's two degrees of separation in Orangeville. Everybody is connected somehow. That's why it's such a wonderful place. We all work in harmony together." Darla Fraser, CEO at the Orangeville library, said a lot of hard work, passion, and community spirit has gone into the unique way for residents to pay respect to veterans and those whose lives have been lost in the country's wars.

"It's been absolutely incredible to see the excitement and passion of the community around this project," said Fraser. "We have so many poppies, and they just keep coming in.

"This will be a truly inspirational and [a] beautiful tribute in our downtown to service members past, present and future."

The project exceeded its target of 2,022 handmade poppies, with more than 3,300 being provided by local crafters.

Poppies have been provided by individuals and community groups such as church groups, the Lord Dufferin Centre, local seniors groups, Orange thREADS, the horticultural society, and local Brownies and Scouts.