

Palgrave United Community Kitchen evolves to serve community]

Yoga, nordic walking among free activities offered by group

By Zachary Roman

You might not expect your local community kitchen to also offer yoga classes.

But at the Palgrave United Community Kitchen (PUCK), run out of the Palgrave United Church, you can expect that and more.

While PUCK is run out of a church, it's a non-religious group and everyone is welcome to participate in its activities.

Barb Imrie from the PUCK explained the kitchen was first opened in 2009 and celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2019, not long before the COVID-19 pandemic hit and changed the world.

"The rules that said we couldn't cook or be indoors made it pretty much stop," said Imrie. "We tried a subscription box - come here, pick up the ingredients, pick up the recipes, go home and put on your Zoom. That didn't work because the best part of the cooking process is not only cooking together but eating together."

Imrie explained that PUCK was at a crossroads where it needed to decide how to operate moving forward during a challenging time. A survey was launched to see what the community wanted to see from PUCK, with those entering getting a chance to win a local food basket. PUCK found the community still really wanted to be together, and that's when the idea for an outdoor yoga class came to be.

"We could have done food and had it picked up at the door, but there were other organizations already doing that," said Imrie. "So, we said let's look at how we can continue being a community."

Imrie said PUCK is not only about cooking but about creating community and caring for the environment. The first funding that PUCK received during COVID was a New Horizons Grant, which is for programs where senior volunteers mentor other seniors. This grant was used to start PUCK's yoga program, with local instructor Maureen Martin-Edey.

"We shifted focus in about a month, and we had close to 20 new people we had never seen before," said Imrie, adding that the therapeutic value of the program was great for many attendees.

When the New Horizons funding ran out, Imrie said the Town of Caledon stepped in to help with funding, and, because of that, PUCK's yoga and nordic walking programs can remain free to all and keep running indefinitely. The Rotary Club of Palgrave is also a supporter of PUCK.

Imrie said PUCK is always looking for more volunteers, especially as the group looks to get back into doing more cooking. PUCK is currently working on its strategic plan for the next ten years, and Imrie said that means it's a great time to get involved.

In addition to its other initiatives, PUCK is also a small business incubator, offering local businesses an affordable certified kitchen to start their food-based business in.

"We're very economical, we're not charging an arm and a leg," said Imrie. "For \$25 an hour, you don't have to find all the equipment and drag it here. You just have to have your ingredients."

Imrie said since the beginning of the pandemic, five small businesses have started up with the help of the kitchen and continue to use it to this day.

Those interested in learning more about PUCK's programs or getting involved can visit www.palgravekitchen.org or call 905-880-0303.