

Empty Bowls Headwaters fundraiser set for October 17 in Alton

By Rob Paul

Over 30 years ago, art teacher John Hartom began the Empty Bowls fundraiser as a way to engage his students and get them involved in a local food drive by having them make ceramic bowls to serve a soup lunch to staff with while requesting donations.

The fundraiser is now an annual global movement that is engrained in Caledon.

Empty Bowls Headwaters is returning to Alton for its 12th annual fundraiser led by Ann Randeraad. This year the fundraiser will be a carry-out even on Sunday, October 17 from 11:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Alton Legion.

Tickets are \$45 and can be purchased online at annranderaadpottery.com or at Booklore in Orangeville or Gourmandissimo in Caledon. There's also an opportunity to donate directly to the fundraiser online. This year's soup providers are Absolute Catering, Gormandissimo, Lavender Blue, Mrs. Mitchell's, the Busholme, and the Mad Hatter.

After always wanting to get involved in an Empty Bowls program, Randeraad decided she might as well start her own in the Caledon area to help support local food programs.

'Empty Bowls is an international program that started in the States and a lot of pottery guilds and art organizations over the years have adopted the program,' said Randeraad. 'What it entails is potters or clay artists make and donate bowls and then the funds that are raised go towards a local food program. Some Empty Bowls programs also include a food component.'

'So, after doing pottery for about 10 or 15 years, I really thought I would like to donate to an Empty Bowls program, but I couldn't find a program that was reasonably close by, or I'd find out about an event after the fact. Finally, I was like, 'okay, maybe I'm supposed to start one locally.' So, that's literally what I did and I started it 12 years ago at the Alton Mill and on average most years we raise about \$10,000 so it's been a good event.'

Despite COVID making this year a little trickier than in years past, attendees will be able to get a handmade bowl as well as soup from a local chef to show their support. They're encouraged to bring non-perishable items for the food drive that will coincide with the Empty Bowls event.

'Potters donate the bowls, and we include a food component with ours,' Randeraad said. 'This year we have six different restaurants and chefs donating soup to the event. When people come out on the day of the event, it's a little different this year, it's a drive-thru take-out type of program to be COVID ready, so it won't be as social as it's been in the past, but that's just for the time being and once we get back to normal, we'll return to the previous format. So, the chefs donate an allotment of soup?some have been donating since the very beginning of this for us?and any soup that is leftover after the day also gets donated to food programs. We also do a non-perishable food drive as part of the event as well so people can bring out food to donate.'

To make sure every supporter is happy, there will be a plethora of different types of bowls available throughout the event.

'On the day of the event, those who attend will...drive up to the door and when it's their turn, they'll go in and they'll be able to choose one of the bowls?there will probably be between 60 and 80 bowls out at any given time,' she said. 'Although there are really about 350 bowls made, they won't all be out at the same time because we want to be sure to have a wide variety throughout the day for people to choose from. We want to make sure everyone has a chance at picking the bowl they want by putting out an assortment of bowls. In the past, people have felt they need to come first thing to get the best choices, but we pre-sort them to make sure all the different bowls are available through the whole event.'

What makes the fundraiser so unique in Randeraad's eyes is that it goes beyond the one day of support when attendees continue to

use the bowls they take home and spread the story of Empty Bowls, which in turn leads to more awareness for local food programs.

?The concept is fantastic and when John Hartom started it, he thought it would only be a one-time event,? she said. ?But because it's such a well-rounded concept it's continued. It's well-rounded because when people get the bowls and take them home, to me it's a ripple forward effect. When they take the bowl out with company over or any time they eat out of the bowls they'll think about the program which leads to the story being shared. It's a way to pay it forward and it's almost as if the story itself gives more visibility to the challenge and need because the program isn't just about raising money, it's about raising awareness.?

Although Randeraad and the Empty Bowls Headwaters team haven't decided which food program in need the fundraising will benefit this year, you can be sure it will go to supporting a local organization.

?It varies from year to year, but it goes to various local food programs, and I say food programs vs. food banks because it doesn't have to be a food bank,? she said. ?For example, Westminster Church has a program called the Cupboard and we've given to them many times and it's a place where people can get food and they also have a cooking program to help educate people about the best economical and nutritious way to make food. So, it might go to the Cupboard or in the past we've given to Caledon Community Services, Family Transition Health, and the Orangeville Food Bank and various programs.

?It's not always the same program, but the bottom line is we have many organizations within the community that have food programs that need assistance. When funds are being raised and we think of food banks, it's always major food banks which most often have the visibility and support from government agencies whereas smaller programs do not. I've really felt over the years I would like to make a bigger impact on a smaller local program vs. making a smaller impact on a bigger program.?