

Festive Giving Program at HollyFest supports the fight against local food insecurity

By Sam Odrowski

As the holidays draw closer, many people struggle to find the perfect gift for everyone on their Christmas shopping list. They may ask themselves, "What should I buy for someone who has everything?"

Well, the Orangeville Food Bank and Dufferin Food Share have the perfect answer to that question - the gift of charity.

This holiday season, they've launched the Festive Giving Campaign in partnership with the Orangeville Citizen, running now until Dec. 31. The initiative offers Festive Giving Cards in denominations of \$25, \$50, or \$100, which can be purchased as a donation to the food bank and gifted to friends, family or coworkers, in their honour.

These cards can be found at the Orangeville Food Bank (3 Commerce Rd.), Orangeville Citizen (10 First St.), and the inaugural HollyFest, hosted indoors at the Orangeville Fairgrounds (247090 Sideroad 5, Mono). Organized by the Orangeville Citizen, HollyFest is a curated market featuring over 100 amazing vendors, and runs this Saturday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. While the event is free to attend, cash, non-perishable food donations and purchases of the Festive Giving Cards are encouraged.

"If you live in this community and want to give back, this is a really great way of doing it," said Carrie-Anne DeCaprio, donor engagement and outreach manager at the Orangeville Food Bank. "Even if you're not going to stop by and purchase one of the cards, stop by our booth, check them out, and have a conversation with us. We just love talking to people about what's happening at the food bank. It's a beautiful place to be."

With a holiday-themed design, these cards fit easily into envelopes and are an excellent way to find the perfect gift while helping combat food insecurity locally.

As the Orangeville Food Bank continues to see a rise in demand, this campaign helps ensure locals who are struggling to afford food remain fed.

"Right now, we're at about a 26,000-pound-per-month food deficit, so 54,000 pounds are going out the front door while 26,000 pounds of food are coming in the back door," DeCaprio explained.

"What we're finding is we're actually having to purchase more non-perishable and perishable food. We have always had great success with financial donations, so that's where these cards come into play. We're able to use those financial donations to purchase the product we need. However, year to date, we are down about \$200,000 in financial donations."

With the Orangeville Food Bank not receiving regular government funding and experiencing a consistent increase in demand, the organization requires further community support to meet its needs.

Last month, the Orangeville Food Bank served 1,566 individuals, compared to 1,424 over the same month in 2024 and 1,146 during the same month in 2023.

"We're seeing an additional 400 people per month over the last two years," said DeCaprio. "Donations are needed now more than ever."

She said it's also important to note that the food bank is an emergency food service, so it can only provide clients with an average of five to six days' worth of perishable and non-perishable items.

To help fill the gap many local families and individuals are facing, the Orangeville Food Bank directs its users to other food services. These include Westminster United Church's Milk and Formula Program, the Lighthouse's daily free lunch program, and St. Mark's Anglican Church's Food Cupboard.

DeCaprio said it's important for the community to know that the Orangeville Food Bank solely supports people living locally.

And stopping by HollyFest to purchase a Festive Giving Card or to drop off a non-perishable donation is a great way to help while exploring unique products from a variety of vendors.

"I think the cards are a really nice way to give a gift. It gives both the person giving the gift and the person receiving it, a warm and fuzzy feeling on the inside," said DeCaprio.

"Not only is it a gift for the person that you're giving it to, but it is a gift to those in need in our community."

HollyFest vendors include jewellery, crocheting, woodworking, stationery items, candles, skincare products, baked goods, floral arrangements, potted plants, and home décor. There will be businesses and not-for-profits from Dufferin County set up as well.

The two-day event also features food and beverage vendors, along with a food and coffee truck.

And what would a Christmas Market be without Santa Claus? Kris Kringle will be visiting on Saturday, and the Grinch will stop in on Sunday for meet-and-greets, and attendees can take free cellphone photos.

"Stop by and get into the spirit of giving," said Orangeville Citizen General Manager Doug Rowe. "We're happy to work with the local food bank while putting on a Christmas-themed market at the fairgrounds for the community to enjoy. We encourage everyone to check it out and enjoy two days of Christmas cheer."