

Welcome Wagon relauches in Caledon

Written By JOSHUA SANTOS

Two women have recently relaunched a program to connect residents in the community.

Paula Giovannozzi and Joyce Ann Farris have been going to Palgrave, Bolton, Inglewood, Terra Cotta, Caledon East, Mono Mills, Victoria, Valley Wood and all across Caledon to reintroduce the Welcome Wagon.

"When I first moved there, there was a community spirit," said Joyce Ann Farris, representative of Welcome Wagon Caledon.

People would say hi to each other. Now, it's growing so fast that people are moving from other areas and they're not meeting each other.

"I think it's very important that the community come together and get to know each other and have that community spirit and have that friendliness and feel part of a community and just feel welcomed. I want the people to feel welcomed when they come into our neighbourhood."

Giovannozzi was born and raised in Caledon while Farris moved in 1992. They know the area quite well and look forward to meeting new people discussing all the community has to offer.

Welcome Wagon takes its name from the Conestoga wagons of frontier days, when settlers would bring supplies to greet passing wagon trains and encourage them to settle in their community, according to a news release.

The program in Caledon works in two ways. Giovannozzi and Farris meet new homeowners, discuss information while sponsored businesses provide them with an offering.

"All the new homeowners that move into Caledon, we go and welcome them and provide them with all the civic information they need for their new home," said Farris. "We tell them all about the programs that are available, we tell them about town hall, we tell them about the fire department, rec and parks, schools; all the things they need to know to make them feel welcomed in their new environment."

"We have sponsored businesses who actually put gifts in our basket, that we actually present to the homeowners so they know where to shop, where to get their hair done, where to go to a pharmacy, what dentist to go to."

Welcome Wagon Canada launched in 1930 opening their first office in Vancouver, B.C. They provide personal visits, complementary coupons, exclusive deals, organize events in the community and services to help families with lifestyle changes, such as moving to a new neighbourhood, getting married or having a baby, according to their website.

"It's been in Caledon for a long time but what happened was the last lady retired about 12 years ago," said Farris. Paula and I just started on board about a month ago. There hasn't been a lot of representation. They did have somebody else but she became ill and had some family illnesses so she didn't do much but Paula and I started on board about a month ago."

Farris previously saw an ad from the organization that stating they were looking for representatives in the Caledon area.

Farris and Giovannozzi both emailed Pat Neuman, president and CEO of Welcome Wagon expressing their interest in becoming the Caledon area representatives.

"Pat spoke to both of us and they were only looking for one person initially, but Paula and I hit it off and said we really want to work together," said Farris. "We developed a friendship, which makes it much easier to be going out and meeting people. It makes it so much more fun and we become really good friends."

Aside from the aforementioned locations, the two have been meeting people in Southfields to speak with newcomers in that area. Southfields is receiving an influx of residents with development occurring at a fast pace.

"We met with a dentist and we met with a coffee shop," said Farris. "They had not really heard about us, so we started explaining to them and they thought it was really a neat thing. The coffee shop we were talking to there is doing a meet and greet so we can have people come into the coffee shop and meet each other because for them it is a new experience. They haven't really heard about it and didn't know that it existed."

"I know we have our work cut out for us in that area. When we go to Caledon East or Bolton, people have heard of Welcome Wagon and they know about us but the newcomers to Canada, they haven't, so we're explaining it to them what it is and we're all having a very nice experience going into that area."

The representatives started the program again about four months ago. They plan to host different events, like meet and greets, bridal shows and craft shows among other ideas.

"We also want to set up a venue where our sponsors can actually be presented to the public at these venues and they can actually talk to them," said Farris. We also want to do the new baby births. We go to the hospital and with the permission with the parents, we get the information of the new baby and then we go to their home and visit the mom once she's settled in with the child and present them

with gifts that our sponsors give them.?

For more information on the Welcome Wagon, visit www.welcomewagon.ca, email Farris at joyceannfarris@gmail.com or email Giovannozzi at paulagiovannozzi@gmail.com.