

Community comes together



Above, a few of the Community That Comes Together group in Coe Hill gathering food and Christmas gifts for kids and seniors. From left, standing, Jono Gooch, Lloyd Embury, Tracey Hughes, Donny Morrison, Lorre White. From left, seated, Patty Embury, Peter Morrison, Lori Harris, Helen Cayer. / JIM EADIE Special to This Week

By Jim Eadie

For the second Christmas season in Wollaston Township, local community volunteer Patty Embury, and her large collection for supporters and helpers have been gathering and distributing food and Christmas gifts for folks at risk of missing out.

‘We call ourselves: The Community That Comes Together,’ she said describing the grassroots response to poverty and loneliness that has emerged in Coe Hill area.

‘We focus on children and seniors,’ she said. ‘We have a lot of seniors here, and many have family but they are very, very lonely at Christmas time. We are a small community. We can be sure they can have food and a gift. These are the unseen and forgotten people of Wollaston Township.’

The centre point of the project is the Coe Hill Café, in the centre of the hamlet. Owners Tracey and Joe Hughes, staff and customers talk up the project, which depends on word of mouth. By Christmas time there is little room left anywhere in the café to put donated gifts of everything from toys, to handmade hats and mittens.

Last year Embury struck up a conversation with a five-year-old boy who was waiting for his mom at the food bank just down the street from the café.

‘He sat down with me, and I asked him who was his hero?’ said Embury. ‘He said I have got lots of heroes. I [asked], who is your favourite hero? He told me his real heroes were the Coe Hill Fire Department. I tell you, my heart fell to pieces. He said he was kinda small to play hockey, and he didn’t have a stick, but I went over to the café and brought him back a brand-new basketball.’ Embury was so moved by this conversation, she decided to ask local heroes Wollaston Township firefighters to autograph hockey sticks and basketballs for children this year. They promptly obliged.

One of the heroes to sign sticks and balls is the 2016 Wollaston Fire Department Firefighter of the Year, Jono Gooch.

‘Jono has been a very welcome addition to our small group,’ said former Wollaston Township fire chief Rick Middleton. ‘He always has a positive attitude, learns quickly and asks thoughtful questions. He is always here to support fire department ventures such as open houses and volunteers extra time to share the skills he has. He is always professional, polite, and courteous in public, doesn’t gossip about proprietary information on calls, or internal discussions. He is always calm and cool on any scene no matter what the circumstances. We were able to attract three recruits of his calibre this year, but he stood out.’

Embury is proud of the local support from residents, businesses, cottagers, even visiting health care workers making donations to the project. All of them are local heroes to her.