

Golf tourney raises \$92,000 for those battling addiction



By Nate Smelle

According to a recently released report by the Ontario Drug Policy Research Network and Public Health Ontario, over the past four years, substance toxicity deaths in Ontario have nearly doubled. On Sept. 23, 2020, Papineau Lake resident Vera Robinson's son Andrew tragically passed away of an overdose, becoming one of the 8,767 accidental substance toxicity deaths recorded in the province between 2018 and 2021, that involved alcohol, stimulants, benzodiazepines, and/or opioids. To honour the memory of her son, and help others who are also struggling with addiction, Robinson has established the Andrew Robinson Memorial Golf Tournament. The third annual Andrew Robinson Memorial Golf Tournament was held on Sept. 16 at the Harbour View Golf and Country Club near Barrie. Since its inception in 2021, support for the tournament has been growing. This year alone, Robinson said they were able to raise a record \$92,000. Of this total, she said that \$31,000 raised from the raffle and charity auctions will go towards the Andrew Robinson Scholarship Fund. The scholarship, Robinson said, is intended to give a hand up to anyone in Ontario who is in recovery and interested in furthering their education. After coming up with the idea to establish the fund, Robinson approached the Vitanova Foundation in Vaughan, which agreed to administer the fund. Acknowledging that Andrew was passionate about education and was working towards a University degree himself, Robinson told Bancroft This Week she takes pride in knowing that her son's legacy is helping others help themselves. She said the thought of helping someone in recovery receive funding to attend college or university made her very happy. "The first year just over \$8,000 was raised and available for someone to apply," said Robinson. "The second year just over \$21,000 was raised ? three people are currently in college/university ? and this year we have over \$31,000 in the account from the 2023 Andrew Robinson Memorial Golf Tournament. I hope people will continue to donate." Expressing her gratitude to all who contributed to the success of this year's tourney, Robinson extended special thanks to the many unions that stepped up to offer their support. "Getting some of the unions to sponsor and take part in supporting [the tournament] has grown and this year we also had the IBEW Local 353, BMIU Local 1, UNIFOR Local 252 become first time sponsors," explained Robinson. "Labourers are five to seven times more likely to die of an opioid-related overdose than people in other professions. It's a staggering fact! I have tried to get many of the construction/trucking businesses on board in this area with no interest. Robinson continued, "Receiving \$20,000 from both LIUNA Local 183 and IUOE Local 793 honestly brought me to tears when I received the news. The tremendous impact this will have with expenses at Vitanova and funding for the Andrew Robinson scholarship is immense. We were sold out for golfers early and so many businesses, friends and neighbours offered support by sponsoring and donating items for the raffle, silent auction and live auction. "Recognizing the tremendous amount of work that goes into putting together the tournament, Robinson said she has already started to reach out for sponsorship and donation of items for next year's event. Highlighting that the fourth Andrew Robinson Memorial Golf Tournament will take place Saturday, Sept. 14 at Harbour View Golf and Country Club, Robinson noted for anyone thinking about making a donation that Vitanova will provide a

charitable tax receipt for all donations received. "Something I hope people will understand is that any man can live at Vitanova and receive treatment at no cost," added Robinson. "They also offer a free day program for men and women. It isn't limited to those living in Woodbridge where the Vitanova Foundation is located. Therefore, I look for support from any business or individual living anywhere." Having worked with Vitanova since it was founded more than decades ago, Cindy Cepparo has been serving as the foundation's executive director since 2020. Through her work, she said when discussing how individuals and families recover from addiction she has learned to define "success" in a special way. "We see success stories all the time, but success in recovery is tough," Cepparo explained. "It's not as though you come into recovery, or you come into a program and you don't relapse. Unfortunately, relapse is common, so for us when we talk about success, we talk about a client who doesn't give up, a client who continues to do the programming, who continues to go to work, who continues to be part of their family. That's success." Over the past 35 years, Cepparo said Vitanova has helped with the recovery of more than 18,000 clients and their families. Currently, she said they offer a variety of long-term recovery programs lasting anywhere from three months to two years. These programs include: a bed-based program for men, with a 34 bed capacity; a day treatment program for men and women; a family support group; and, an aftercare program. According to Cepparo, in the near future the Vitanova Foundation is also planning to expand its services through the creation of a bed-based program for women battling addiction. As essential as it is for their clients to heal as individuals, Cepparo said it is also very important for their families to go through recovery and heal as well. At Vitanova, she said they believe that in order for a client to fully recover, their family must be willing to make changes as well. "It's not just about the person who says 'I have a drug problem,' it's about the entire family saying 'what changes do we need to make? How can we support our son, daughter, or my husband? What can we do to all make the changes needed?'" So it's not just about the individual who presents with a drug or alcohol problem. It's really about the whole family making the necessary changes they need to make, in order to be happy together and healthy together," said Cepparo. For those interested in learning more about the Vitanova Foundation's programs, or the Andrew Robinson Scholarship fund visit Vitanova's website at: www.vitanova.ca. Anyone interested in sponsoring the Andrew Robinson Memorial Golf Tournament or donating items for the silent auction or raffle can contact Vera by email at: veragunn7@gmail.com; or, by phone at: 416-998-6495.