

Hospice North Hastings Lights of Love Memorial exceeds expectations



By Michael Riley

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Hospice North Hastings held its first annual Lights of Love Memorial on Nov. 29 at their Hospice house at 27 Bridge Street North. By purchasing lights by donation to put on six trees in front outside of hospice, local residents were able to honour and remember loved ones who'd passed on. Michael Brooks, board chair with Hospice North Hastings, called "very successful for their first year." Hospice North Hastings is a four-bed residential hospice in Bancroft, fully staffed with Registered Practical Nurses, PSWs and a grief and bereavement counsellor. Executive director Keitha McNeil and medical director Dr. Micayla Ahearn support the staff. The goal of hospice is to provide end of life care while accommodating any final wishes the patient may have. These have included weddings, birthday parties, and final visits from the patient's pet. Hospice, whose motto is "caring where there is no curing" is an extension of the health care system, and they're there to support patients at the end of their lives and to help families and loved ones get through this very difficult time. Although Hospice is partially funded by the Ontario government, they rely heavily on the local community. Brooks say they couldn't do this without them. While this is the first year for the Lights of Love Memorial, Brooks said he could see it becoming one of their major fundraisers. The Lights of Love Memorial was very well attended on Nov. 29 and The Joyful Ringers entertained the crowd with their music as they waited for the names to be called out in memory of those that people had lost. Brooks said they had a great group there that evening and the weather had cooperated, and it was like a "Hallmark movie." He said they couldn't have accomplished what they did without a lot of help. "I'd like to thank the entire staff, volunteers and board members of Hospice North Hastings who put in endless hours to put this together. I would also like to thank the following people for their help; Dr. Brian Harrison, North Hastings Family Pharmacy, Mackie Insurance and Financial, ReMax Country Classics, Stan Blanc, Joshua Brooks, Brett Moule, Central Ontario Scrapyard, Gary Lonergan of Sharett Construction, AK Chiropractic, Kirsten Fudge, Stacey Pitts, It Stix Signs and Graphics, Nancy and Rob Clements, Linda York and Vance Motors. Thank you all for helping us with this," he says. Brooks told the crowd that the event was all about remembering those who weren't with them tonight. "Every light on the Christmas tree represents someone we have lost and after we throw the switch, we will have a reading aloud of the names of these individuals," he says. Once the trees were lit, Brooks, Keitha Newman, executive director at Hospice and Joan Grant, board director at Hospice, read out five pages of names. Donations to buy a light for a loved one can still be made by going to the Hospice website at www.hospicenorthhastings.com and clicking on the donate button. Newman told the crowd that this time of year can be difficult for many who are grieving their loved ones. "We at Hospice like to support in any way we can, so we are offering two special seasonal holiday grieving sessions; one on Dec. 5 and one on Dec. 12. If that is something you're interested in, or you feel you could use that support, please reach out to us here and we can connect with you," she says. After the names were read out, Christmas carol sheets were handed out and with musical accompaniment by The Joyful Ringers, everyone sang Christmas carols to

close out the evening. Brooks told Bancroft This Week that they had a great turnout for their first annual Lights of Love Memorial. 'Some of the feedback that we received from those who attended included, 'very emotional,' 'a Hallmark moment,' and 'brought a tear to my eye.' The Joyful Ringers and the snow flurries just added to the night. Over \$10,000 was raised for Hospice North Hastings by those who donated to have a light on the tree in memory of a loved one who had passed. The trees and property at Hospice North Hastings will continue to be lit up during the holiday season,' he says. 'The Hospice thanks the community for their ongoing support and generosity.'