

Lunch and Learn focuses on breast cancer awareness



By Michael Riley

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Tudor and Cashel had a Lunch and Learn on breast cancer awareness on Oct. 23 featuring Kim Carson, CEO of Breast Cancer Canada, courtesy of the Ontario Seniors Accessibility Grant 2024-2025, and facilitated by Councillor Elain Holloway. With thousands of Canadians affected by breast cancer, both male and female patients and their families, Carson enlightened attendees about the science, screening, detection, treatment and patient outcomes of this disease. Breast Cancer Canada has focused on breast cancer research since 1991, focusing on precision oncology (personalized care). They are the only national breast cancer association in Canada that has a clear mandate to raise money for research and advocate and educate on the progress of new research evidence. They don't get government funding, and the generosity of donors enables their progress. Carson, who is also the mayor of Limerick Township, told folks who attended the Lunch and Learn on Oct. 23 that BCC has been working with the various provinces and the federal government to get the screening age for breast cancer lowered to 40 years from its current 50 years, and Ontario did just that on Oct. 8. "I've been the CEO for 10 years and the difference from where we were 10 years ago and where we are now is ground breaking. It's amazing what research has done," she says. Carson said they used to think there were three types of breast cancer but now know there are over 50 types, which makes treatment and diagnosis very difficult. She said the statistics are still the same; one in eight women will be diagnosed in their lifetime. This year, 30,000 will be diagnosed and 30,500 will be in 2025. While mostly women are diagnosed, men are also diagnosed each year. Carson says that when it comes to breast cancer research, this is how they function at BCC. They make progress with their heads but it's their hearts that respond to the good news and breakthroughs. So, we're reframing our research to help people see how truly beautiful and meaningful the results are and inspire them to join us in a laser focus pursuit to end breast cancer for good. The fact is if they think it won't make a difference, we have the science to show that it does. In a disease that feels so ugly and with patients that often feel the same, we can remind them of the beauty of our actions and progress is beautiful. So, everything we do is progress, is beautiful. So, you don't hear from us the word hope. We don't hope the science works. We don't hope that our research is going to work. We really focus on things that are going to work and things that are very transitional and very personalized medicine. So, you'll hear words like personalized medicine and precision oncology. Because there are 50 different types of breast cancer, what we do now is take your breast cancer tumour and test it to see what it is and then we target the treatment for that exact thing. So that's why we're having so much success helping women with their health issues," she says. Carson said BCC funds research in four areas; science (the research that looks into the fundamental biological processes underlying breast cancer development and progression), screening and detection (focus on developing new, less invasive technologies that offer higher quality results for early cancer detection like genomic blood tests), targeted treatment and diagnosis (research explores treatments tailored to the over 50 types of breast cancer like novel drug targets, exploring combination therapies, immunotherapy and other precision medicine approaches) and patient reported outcomes (gathering and analyzing data directly from patients to better understand their experiences and needs throughout the cancer care journey, shaping treatment and surgical interventions). She also elucidated on how BCC disperses its funding to different organizations that are researching new treatments

for this disease, like the Breast Cancer Translational Research Unit, Princess Margaret Cancer Centre, the Ontario Institute for Cancer Research and many others. She also told the audience about some new initiatives BCC is doing like Progress Connect (an online tool providing patients with information specific to their type of breast cancer, providing up to date information for them to ask questions and have meaningful dialogue with their oncologist) and the Progress Tracker Breast Cancer Registry (collection of patient reported outcomes from breast cancer patients across Canada, leading to more directed research, updates in health care policies, and treatment advances). More information can be found at www.breastcancerprogress.ca. Carson told the attendees that breast cancer used to be a diagnosis where people panicked, but with all the targeted treatments and therapies, if they're caught early, in stage 0 or stage 1, it's an almost 100 per cent cure rate. "You'll never get it again. You'll be fine. It's a little more complicated when you get into stage 2, 3, or 4. But the breakthroughs are massive. We're making big progress on how to treat breast cancer. My takeaway is that it's actually good news. Although it's still a scary disease, we have a lot of great outcomes," she says. Carson then took questions from the attendees. Holloway told Bancroft This Week on Oct. 26 that she found the session with Carson to be extremely informative, dispelling some of the misunderstandings about breast cancer and breast cancer research. "It's encouraging to know that despite the 'horror' of receiving a breast cancer diagnosis, it isn't necessarily a death sentence. Kim shared on changes being made in the medical profession and several testimonies on the impact breast cancer research has had on survival rates. It was a very positive discussion on a somewhat difficult topic that shed some truths about managing our own healthcare including what is happening with the search for a cure," she says. "I am personally grateful Kim took time out of her very busy schedule."