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NIAGARA LIFESTYLE

Still building, a revived Kiwanis Club of Thorold already making an impact

The recently formed service club is looking to create its signature fundraiser and already supports a trio of charities.

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Kiwanis Club of Thorold members include founder Rick Westlake, president Ken Sentence, director Megan Gilchrist, treasurer Gerry Sheahan and vice-president Kathleen Kelly.

Mike Zettel/Metroland

By Mike Zettel Reporter Niagara This Week Thorold

It was during what should have been a heartwarming occasion last fall that Rick Westlake's heart sunk a little bit instead.

Representing Kiwanis Club of St. Catharines, Westlake was at Thorold Community Activities Group (TCAG) where he presented \$5,000 to replace a mural that had been showing its age.

At the time, Westlake couldn't shake the notion Thorold had lost something special when its local Kiwanis club folded more than 20 years ago.

"I thought, why aren't we doing this in our own community? Why are we relying on a St. Catharines charity?" he said.

Fast-forward a few months and that's exactly what's happening.

Scouring all the business and community contacts he could find and putting out a general call, Westlake was able to sign up 19 people for the newly reformed Kiwanis Club of Thorold.

The club held its charter meeting in January and established its leadership team: president Ken Sentence, president-elect Karen Blackley (she will become president in 2027), vice-president Kathleen Kelly, secretary Jessica Bocchinfuso and treasurer Gerry Sheahan.

The group participates in the weekly Kiwanis TV bingo on Cogeco's YourTV Niagara with four other clubs: St. Catharines, Niagara Falls Stamford, Welland and West Lincoln.

Sentence said with a handful of monthly meetings under its belt, the club is still in its building stage. It's in the process of developing a signature fundraiser to support its mission: to improve lives, one child and one community at a time.

He said plans are nearly cemented for a bottle drive and the club is considering a car rally. But it still needs to figure out what its big annual event will be.

"We need to raise some money so we can fulfil our mandate of helping kids," he said.

Also to be determined is how best to serve the community. Sheahan said the club will be conducting a community analysis to figure out how it can be of the most use.

"We also want to know what the community needs," he said.

In the meantime, as part of the requirements to participate in TV bingo, Thorold Kiwanis Club is supporting three charities: TCAG, Community Care of St. Catharines and Thorold, and the Early Childhood Community Development Centre

(ECCDC).



The Early Childhood Community Development Centre outreach van. Kiwanis Club of Thorold committed nearly \$2,000 a year toward a four-year lease.

Early Childhood Community Development Centre

On Schmon Parkway, ECCDC leases a community outreach van it uses to deliver resources to early learning and child-care programs throughout the region.

The Kiwanis club's nearly \$2,000-a-year contribution went toward the organization's new four-year lease for the van, which is also supported by the St. Catharines, Niagara Falls Stamford and Welland clubs.

Kelly Bol, an early learning training and events consultant with ECCDC, said the van has made nearly 1,000 deliveries since obtained four years ago.

She said in a large region such as Niagara, it wouldn't be practical for educators to make the trip to the centre.

"It's been really, really great to have that accessible for program (operators) and to have that (lease) renew is exciting," she said.

Because ECCDC is in Thorold, it has joined the Kiwanis as a corporate member and hosts the club's monthly meetings.

Bol said the ECCDC and the Kiwanis club both focus on children, so the partnership makes sense.

"It was a natural fit for us to join them," she said.

Along with building, the Kiwanis club is working to grow its membership. Sentence said it tries to reduce barriers to join by holding meetings monthly instead of weekly, as service clubs typically did in the past.

The club operates with a 3-2-1 model: three hours of community service, two hours of social activity and one meeting per month.

“It’s not too onerous, it’s not too much,” Sentance said.

The club meets at 6:30 p.m. on the second Wednesday of the month.

For more information, go to the club’s [Facebook page](#).



Mike Zettel is a reporter for Niagara This Week.

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