

Bancroft has a big heart

Dear Editor:

Bancroft is known for having a big and generous heart and supports many causes in spite of dealing with entrenched poverty in its midst. Every year Bancroft donates significant sums to the Canadian Cancer Society, the local hospital and residents in need due to circumstances such as illness and fire. These are just a few of the things the citizens of Bancroft support.

However, today I salute Bancroft for having an even bigger heart ? one that recognizes a humanitarian issue beyond the town, the township, the province and our county. Bancroft stakes its place in the world and demonstrates its generosity of spirit by pledging to help a Syrian refugee family in need of a safe haven. By offering to bring a father, mother and their three young children to Bancroft you are part of a world effort to alleviate one of the great humanitarian crises of our time.

Recently I had the opportunity to meet with Judy Edgar, the chair of Social Justice Without Borders. Judy outlined some of the challenges of raising funds for this cause, especially now that the picture of little Alan Kurdi is starting to fade in our minds. She also talked about some of the particular issues of settling a Syrian family in a small, rural town. However, I assured her that this is being done in other places like Bancroft. Bancroft will be able to use the examples of other rural groups and will have the support of those already experienced in refugee work (such as Abraham's Children, the group I co-chair) to help them address the difficulties. Having been a summer visitor to Bancroft for 28 years, with family in the area I know that Bancroft is up for the challenge. None of these issues are insurmountable.

The first and most important goal is to get the Jarad family out of Turkey and to safety in Canada. The family may stay 6 months in Bancroft, or a year or forever. The key thing is to get them to a safe place where they can start to live lives without fear and with hope.

I am now friends with the Al Balkhis, the refugee family I helped to bring to Canada. I drop by for coffee, share meals, go on outings and provide advice and support. They support me too when I have problems that I share. The Jarads will become your neighbours and your friends. You have much to gain by this experience. I told Judy that bringing the Al Balhki family to Canada has been one of the great experiences of my life. When you see ?your refugee family? walking down Hastings Street you are going to feel the same way. You will have saved them.

Sandra Onufryk,

Co-Chair Abraham's Children Together,

Oakville, Ontario and Faraday Township