

Care North Hastings secures seniors' centre grant



By Bill Kilpatrick

The third application was the charm for Care North Hastings, who were finally successful in applying for the 2025-2026 provincial Seniors' Active Living Centre Grant. Jennifer Kauffeldt, the Executive Director for Care North Hastings, was ecstatic about the news. "I'm excited," she stated, "It's a lot of money for Bancroft and it's a lot of money for seniors??" According to a press release from the province of Ontario the seniors grant program will focus on three "key priority" areas. Those areas include "providing opportunities for older adults to stay active and connected in their communities, such as weekly physical activities and social engagements, developing technology and digital solutions to support seniors' social engagement and access to programs and services, and increasing access to information and supports for health prevention and promotion."

The grant itself will be dispersed over five years beginning with start up funds for 2025 in the amount of \$12,500 that will help establish a senior's centre in Bancroft, followed by smaller applications which will allow access to \$55,000 each year to address the key program and activity priority areas. According to Kauffeldt, Care North Hastings has hired Monica Sears as the community outreach coordinator for the program and they have partnered with the Town of Bancroft, the Lifestyle enrichment and fitness centre (the LEAF centre), and Bancroft Community transit to ensure that seniors have a space for their activities and transportation to and from the activities.

Most importantly Kauffeldt wants to ensure that seniors can access those activities for free. Those activities include, but are not limited to, things such as lunch and learns where seniors will be provided a healthy lunch and have the opportunity to hear from

guest speakers such as the Community Advocacy and Legal Centre, members of the OPP, Paramedicine, dieticians, nurses, IT specialists and members of the health unit. Other activities include games, arts and crafts, knitting, line dancing, Zumba, chair yoga, meditation, genealogy, exercise, weigh-ins, blood pressure checks, and many more.

The point of this program, however, is not to tell seniors what they should be doing it's to seek input from those who are over 55 and then use the grant money to provide those activities within the community. Not only that, says Sears, but seniors will also be running the programs. "The idea is that it is for seniors and by seniors," said Sears, "So, it's all volunteer based and you have seniors that are running programs [as] volunteers and they are also members of the club. Then they are giving back to the centre. So, whatever they want to see we help facilitate that program."

One of the ways that Sears is seeking this input is through a series of open house style gatherings at the LEAF centre beginning Friday, March 14 from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m. and continuing for the next two Fridays in March. Seniors can attend and find out more information about the current activities that are being offered and provide feedback and ideas for future activities as well. "For the month of March," Sears told Bancroft This Week, "we have programs going on Monday to Friday. These are preestablished groups in our community that either needed a different venue or it was a need that was brought to the instructor's attention" on Friday's, because this is new, [I thought] let's do a social drop in and some information."

While there is some programming that is being offered for the month of March Sears pointed out that it will change in April. "We are going to have different programs going on throughout the day as well," she stated, "it's not like they're just getting one program once a week. That's for March only to gauge participation and see what that's going to be like." Currently Sears is in discussion with other municipalities who have seniors clubs to find out what activities and supports they provide to their seniors to avoid duplication of services. She is also in discussion with instructors who are "ready to go" for April. "There's tons of ideas that can happen," said Sears, "We just want to gauge what we can actually implement that will provide a good return to our members."

Bancroft Mayor Paul Jenkins believes that the seniors centre will provide a good return to those who will utilize it. "I believe this is a great opportunity and service for our community," he said, "The North Hastings area and Bancroft in particular has a much higher percentage of seniors than the provincial average and the addition of a facility/program geared to healthy and active living is just what is needed and deserved for our senior population."

While there is no charge for the activities there is a nominal yearly fee of \$25 to become a member of the senior's centre. Both Kauffeldt and Sears pointed out that the senior's centre will be "revenue neutral" pointing out that any money that is made will be put right back into programming. "We don't need to make money," said Kauffeldt "We're not doing this to make profit. We're doing it so it will be the most cost effective for seniors."

For more information on the programming available at the new seniors club Sears can be reached by phone at 613-332-4700 ext 3, by email at msears@carenh.org, or on Facebook by searching the group North Hastings Seniors Club.