

## SIRCH gives back to North Hastings



by KRISTENA SCHUTT-MOORE

### Staff

Several community organizations gathered at SIRCH Thrift Warehouse on Saturday, Nov. 12, as the volunteers presented North Hastings Community Trust, North Hastings Community Cupboard, and Maggie's Resource Centre with vouchers worth a total of \$10,000. The vouchers will be distributed to the patrons of the three organizations who are in need of assistance. The vouchers will be used to help area residents and families purchase the frozen meals, clothes and other items/programs that the SIRCH Thrift Warehouse provides. SIRCH Community Services is a charitable organization that was set up in Haliburton County, in 1989, to look at gaps in social and health services, and develop programs and services to fill those gaps. The founding executive director, Gena Robertson, still steers the ship, and the reach of SIRCH has expanded over the three decades it has been helping communities. SIRCH now provides a variety of programs and services in and outside of Haliburton County and employs over 25 people. The Thrift Warehouse concept was developed by Ted Scholtes. He opened an 8,000 square foot warehouse in Haliburton around 2008, but was soon swamped with donations and had difficulty managing the enterprise on his own.

He was introduced to SIRCH in 2014 and a partnership was struck where SIRCH managed all aspects of Thrift Warehouse and any profits were shared. When SIRCH was approached a year later to expand to Bancroft, Mr. Scholtes assisted in the process but did not choose to be a partner. In April, 2015, The Thrift Warehouse, fully owned and operated by SIRCH Community Services, opened in Bancroft.

Any program or social enterprise of SIRCH has to meet one or more goals: creating resilience, reducing poverty, and/or encouraging connection. Thrift Warehouse Bancroft meets those goals by: ? Employing people. Typically TWB employs four to five staff, full time, which is one of the best ways to reduce poverty and create resilience.

? Diverting items from local landfills. This year alone, Thrift Warehouse Bancroft has diverted 11,000 cubic feet ? or 179 long bed pickup trucks full ? from landfills in North Hastings. ? Selling a full range of good used items at low prices, including furniture, building supplies, housewares, clothing and more. New items are put out daily. ? Offering training opportunities to volunteers, staff and others. ? Being a touch-point for people (many folks come daily or every other day, simply to talk and feel connected). ? Reinvesting any profits in poverty reduction initiatives in North Hastings. Haliburton and North Hastings are not the only counties benefiting from the work SIRCH does. The Community Action Program for Children and Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program, aimed at leveling the playing field for vulnerable families and children, are offered by SIRCH in City of Kawartha Lakes and Northumberland County, and School's Cool, a kindergarten preparation program, is provided by SIRCH in parts of Muskoka as well

as CKL and Haliburton Counties. Right from the beginning, SIRCH committed to investing any profits from Thrift Warehouse Bancroft, back into poverty reduction and food security initiatives in North Hastings.

It does this currently in two ways: The first is that SIRCH provides North Hastings Community Trust, and North Hastings Community Cupboard with nutritious frozen meals to give out free to residents who are struggling. Prepared meals are essential for those with disabilities, anxiety, lack of cooking skills or resources, and for those who are ill, homeless and elderly. Since the beginning of COVID19, SIRCH has provided over 7,500 nutritious frozen meals, and additional healthy soups, free to North Hastings residents via its partners. The second is that for the past several years, SIRCH has also offered partner organizations free vouchers to give to their clients. The vouchers, which are given to residents of North Hastings who are struggling, allow them to purchase items from Bancroft Thrift Warehouse. This tradition continued on Nov. 12 as the vouchers were presented to North Hastings Community Trust and Maggie's Resource Centre.