

Third yarn bomb supports turtle populations



Hundreds of hand-knit and crocheted turtles have taken over Bancroft to remind motorists to watch for turtles crossing local roads and highways.

This is the third community yarn bomb created, crafted and installed by a group of volunteers from Hospice North Hastings that call themselves, ?Knittervention.?

The volunteer group meets on a weekly basis when they're not volunteering to provide patient care at Hospice North Hastings or providing support at the Bancroft Village Playhouse or Vintage on

Hastings; the two social enterprises operated by the small, rural charity.

In this top-secret operation, Knittervention members worked for months to craft hundreds of turtles, each uniquely styled, to raise awareness in the community just as local turtles are starting to cross highways across the region.

Last fall, after the group of volunteers successfully installed a Remembrance Day yarn bomb, Kelly Wallace, founder of the Think Turtle Conservation Initiative, contacted Hospice North Hastings with a request to partner for an upcoming project. Wallace was working on a series of community lectures, and a full-day event, that led up to World Turtle Day on May 23.

The Knittervention volunteers loved the idea of creating a turtle-themed yarn bomb.

Co-ordinator of Hospice North Hastings Heather Brough says the turtle theme really works for the Knittervention group and for Hospice.

?The message is simple,? Brough says. ?Life is short so don't rush through it. Slow down, appreciate the details and watch for turtles.?

Brough also says that the Knittervention group, through all of their yarn bombs, is helping to create positive awareness for Hospice in the community. When they started crafting the turtles,

Brough says that everyone was trying to use natural colours and earth tones.

?That didn't last,? she laughs. ?The turtles started taking on personalities and then we started using more colours and then there were turtles being created with themed shell designs,?

Brough says the yarn, wool and stuffing was all donated by Hospice supporters and that from donations at Vintage on Hastings, the thrift shop run by Hospice, vintage jewelry and buttons were selected for turtle eyes.

?Every one of these turtles is unique,? Brough says. ?They're different styles, colours and themes. We even have one with a Union Jack and two rings to celebrate the royal wedding.?

While the Knittervention group knit and crocheted their way through the long winter months and the turtles slept, Wallace was busy offering workshops, lectures and full-day turtle events ? all to raise awareness for the time when these beautiful creatures would wake-up, lay eggs and start sharing our roads. Wallace says the local yarn bomb was one more way to get the word out about the importance of turtles.

?As lake bed scavengers and consumers of decaying plant and animal matter, turtles, in particular the snapping turtles, act as the caretakers to lakes and wetlands.? Wallace says. ?The quality of the water would suffer considerably in their absence as the bacteria levels would rise. The activities of the turtles control aquatic vegetation, promote a healthy fish population, healthy wetlands and safeguard humans against the threat of recreational water illnesses caused by bacteria.?

Wallace also says the turtles are a source of wonderment that can be appreciated by all members of our community.

Last year, Wallace says the Ontario Turtle Conservation Centre, home to Kawartha Turtle Trauma Centre, admitted 920 injured turtles from across the region. This number doubled from 2016 and with turtles acting as the caretakers of our local lakes, they are definitely worth saving.

So after months of work, secret meetings, code words and whispers, the turtles were installed at pedestrian crossings and on gateway signs in Bancroft on May 17.

Vintage on Hastings, a social enterprise operated by Hospice North Hastings, is Turtle Headquarters during the 10-day display. This is where people can grab turtle information as well as details for a scavenger hunt challenge. Local folks and visitors to Bancroft are encouraged to interact with the turtles, choose favourites and to interact on social media ? all in the name of raising awareness for the turtles on our local roads.

The Knittervention group installed their first yarn bomb project a year ago with support from the New Horizons for Seniors Program. Two yarn bombs later, the turtle yarn bomb has grown in scope and size with assistance from residents at the Riverstone Retirement Home and from children at Our Lady of Mercy Catholic School.

Local MP Mike Bossio and his team have also worked with Hospice North Hastings and the Knittervention group to share some of the turtles with his colleagues in Ottawa. MPs posed for pictures with some of the travelling ambassador turtles, joining the Bancroft effort remotely, to raise awareness for our local turtles.

Now that the installation is complete, Wallace and Brough say they look forward to seeing how far the message to slow down, appreciate the beauty of life and look out for others ? in this case, the turtles we share out community with ? will travel. And when people share photos on social media with the designated hashtags that are posted at the turtle crossings, the team will be able to track all the posts and follow the yarn bomb's impact.

- Submitted by Barb Shaw