

Tree lighting in Whitney rings in the festive season



By Michael Riley

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Back for its second year after a long hiatus, the tree lighting in Whitney was back on Nov. 24 at the Lester Smith Community Centre. Organized by Councillor Joan Kuiack, Councillor Laurie Sydock, and the beautification committee, the event brought folks out to the community centre, but not as many as last year, according to Kuiack. Kuiack comments on the tree lighting to Bancroft This Week. Councillor Laurie Sydock said planning had gone well and was much the same as last year, with the beautification committee decorating Whitney including the gazebo, the bridge and the community centre for that evening's tree lighting ceremony. This year, Councillor Shawn Pigeon procured the tree to be lit, while Kuiack said that they'd planted a blue spruce in front of it that would be ready to act as the Christmas tree in about 20 years. While the tradition lapsed for many years it was resurrected last year. While Mayor Ethel LaValley had planned to be there, she was unable to attend as she caught COVID-19 and didn't want to pass it on to any of her colleagues or the township's residents. Attendees came by the community centre by 6 p.m. to witness the tree lighting and to donate an ornament and place it on the tree. Donations were also gratefully accepted for baked goods for that night's festivities and for the food bank. Coffee, tea and hot chocolate were on hand for those wanting to get some warmth from the cold temperatures outside. Jim Etmanski, his daughter Allison and his granddaughter Carley got everyone singing Christmas carols like 'Silver Bells,' 'Santa Claus is Coming to Town,' 'Christmas in the Valley,' 'Pretty Paper,' 'Grandma Got Run Over by A Reindeer' and many more over the course of the evening, while they enjoyed their hot beverages and Christmas cookies. Kuiack told Bancroft This Week on Nov. 26 that she thought it went okay but it wasn't as good a turnout as they had last year. 'But the people that were there enjoyed it and the music was good. We talked afterward and we thought maybe there would be some changes next year. We're not going to give up on it yet. We got such a good response last year it was like, okay, we'll try again. Maybe it was the day, being on a Sunday versus a Friday, so we'll look at that,' she says. 'But overall I think it went well and it's certainly something we'll continue to do.'