

Tudor and Cashel NHFS programs help seniors hard hit by COVID-19 pandemic



MICHAEL RILEY Staff

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, with its restrictions and lockdowns, has had a major effect on the physical and mental health of everybody in Canada and around the world. However, it's the seniors, those aged 65 years and up, who have faced the toughest challenges. My parents, both seniors, have faced some of those challenges, but overall have been lucky and fared quite well throughout the past two years of the pandemic, as they have each other and a good group of friends they keep in touch with virtually. Generally, though, seniors over the last 24 months have faced both a physical toll, in terms of diminished health due to the virus and even death, and a mental toll, like dealing with isolation, anxiety and depression. According to the magazine *Nature*, published in Feb. 2021, in an article titled, *The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on wellbeing and cognitive functioning of older adults*, the authors concluded that the pandemic "had a severe impact on the wellbeing, activity level and sleep quality of older adults. Only a small group of participants reported a decline in cognitive functioning. All changes reported during the COVID-19 period were strongly related to depression." Thankfully, there are many programs and services out there to help seniors deal with these unique, once in a lifetime challenges related to COVID-19. One of these is the New Horizons for Seniors funding, available to municipalities and non-profits across Canada. It's a federal grants and contributions program that gives funding for projects that make a difference in the lives of seniors and their communities. The objectives of this funding stream are to promote volunteerism among seniors and other generations, engage seniors in the community through mentoring of others, expand awareness of elder abuse, support the social participation and inclusion of seniors and provide capital assistance for new and existing community projects and programs for seniors. The funding is allocated for community-based projects which can get up to \$25,000 for one year and Pan-Canadian projects which are larger projects to meet the growing social needs for seniors and have substantial community impact. These projects can be up to five years in duration. One of these NHFS funded programs is happening this year in Tudor and Cashel Township, which is putting on some hot takeaway dinners for the seniors in their community. Mayor Libby Clarke says that the dinners were well received by the community and that she was in attendance when Joan Donaldson, one of the volunteers, was welcoming the seniors at the municipal building to pick up their food. "The residents were very excited and were looking forward to having this program continue. However, Feb. 23 will be the last meal provided unfortunately," she says. Another part of this NHFS funding will go toward community gardens, which will be starting up in the spring to interest seniors and other residents and occupy their time. Mary Fox is taking the lead with this initiative, which will be located in the green spaces behind the municipal building. She has lived in Gilmour with her husband since 2002, and has been planning these gardens since late 2020, although COVID-19 has made these plans difficult to bring to fruition. Community gardening dates back to early 19th century Britain, when the government allocated plots of land to the poor to grow flowers and vegetables. They've been a staple here in Canada for decades, providing fresh organic produce for the grower. For some, gardens are a supplementary food source, others like the fact they can get

organic, healthier vegetables they can't get in stores and for others it offers an emotional release from stress, especially having to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic for the past two years, thus improving their mental and physical health. A third activity for seniors from this NHFS grant is a painting workshop held at the municipal building, taught by Gilmour resident Dawn Morrill-Newman. Nancy Carrol, the township's clerk and treasurer, says that they have the opportunity with this funding to have a couple of weeks of classes for anyone who signs up. [Morrill-Newman] is a member of our community that enjoys painting herself. This is her first-time showing others her techniques and that first class seemed to be a hit, she says. It's wonderful that there are programs available like the ones in Tudor and Cashel Township for seniors due to this NHFS funding. Without them, some seniors could be much more lonely and socially isolated, especially during the past two years with the COVID-19 pandemic.