

## Vintage on Hastings to reopen after fire



By Chris Houston

The team behind Bancroft's Hospice Thrift Store are not deterred by their recent fire and are making plans to reopen as soon as possible. Aware that a local man was charged with arson, the organization's executive director urged forgiveness and compassion from Bancroft's residents. On Sept. 25, Keitha McNeil, the executive director of Hospice North Hastings, spoke to Bancroft This Week about the fire that took hold of the organization's thrift store. Around 2 a.m. on Sept. 20, a fire took hold of the rear of 67 Hastings Street N, the building that houses Vintage on Hastings thrift store. The volunteer-run store was described by McNeil as a major source of fundraising for the hospice. McNeil said that the organization was "still very early days in assessing the damage" caused by the fire. She stated that the team was "grateful that nobody was injured or hurt during this horrific event." McNeil said she was "very grateful for the response of the local emergency services. Bancroft police responded quickly, and the fire department was able to contain the fire quite a bit and that resulted in no other business being impacted, which could have been devastating for that whole area." On July 30, 1914, a devastating fire destroyed Bancroft's downtown core. Starting behind what was Willing's Bakery, fire spread through most of Bridge Street West between the bridge and Hastings Street. The fire saw the destruction of The Bancroft Hotel, now rebuilt and known as Bancroft Brew Pub. 110 years later, Bancroft's volunteer fire brigade contained the fire that started just a few hundred feet north of the historical burn. Tracy McGibbon, owner of McG's Cakes on Main, also praised Bancroft's volunteer firefighters. In a Facebook post on Sept. 20 she wrote: "Shout out to Bancroft Fire Department and Bancroft OPP. These first responders were on site immediately and contained the fire, preventing a spread that could have been in the \$ millions. They saved our downtown." McNeil said that the full extent of the damage from the fire is still being investigated, but that it damaged walls, insulation and created a hole in the building's roof that was repaired by contractors later the same day. Retail stock has been

damaged by fire, smoke and firefighting water. The damage has forced the temporary closure of the store. Most of the major damage is on the upper level, McNeil reported, noting that the main floor seems to be mainly intact. The fire started at the rear of the building. McNeil said that the fire started on the outside and it made its way up the side of the building and into the roof attic area. McNeil described the impact of the fire as devastating for her team. She noted community solidarity with the thrift store, and supportive messages have been pouring in, including via the store's Facebook page. An extensive cleanup was underway while McNeil spoke. McNeil's team are working with investigators appointed by the insurance company to assess the damage and ascertain the next steps. While the exact timeline in the short term future is unknown, McNeil was clear that the shop will be re-opening. On Sept. 23, an OPP press release named a 43-year-old Bancroft man who was charged with arson, trespass at night, and failure to comply with undertaking. McNeil was aware of the arrest and said that we hope that people involved can get support and move forward. McNeil encouraged everyone to approach the accused man with kindness and compassion. We certainly don't want to be pointing fingers, the world is a difficult place to live in, and we are grateful that everyone is safe. Revenue from the thrift store supports Hospice North Hastings. The non-profit hospice provides end of life care for people with terminal and life-threatening illnesses. Currently located at 27 Bridge Street East, Bancroft, it was initially founded in 1966 by two nurses in the basement of the old Bancroft Red Cross Hospital. McNeil said that Hospice North Hastings provides care for patients, but that the team prefers to call them guests. The hospice also provides wrap around care for the family of people with terminal and life-threatening illnesses. McNeil said that part of our palliative care is that we offer grief and bereavement support with our social worker. Other sources of funding for the hospice include the provincial government, with funding coming in via Ontario Health and Ontario Health at Home. People wishing to financially support the hospice can support via an ongoing fundraising raffle and at the upcoming Light The Night, Christmas tree lighting event. On Sept. 26, thrift store volunteers met at the hospice. During the meeting, thrift store manager Marilyn Dusome said that the store was looking for more volunteers. We'd appreciate any help, she said.