

WoodShare now independent from Community Trust



By Bill Kilpatrick

The volunteers for the WoodShare program have decided to separate from the North Hastings Community Trust. The program has provided emergency firewood to residents of North Hastings for the last 10 or so years, but when the Community Trust closed their doors in December 2023, it left the future of the program in limbo and the volunteers did not want to see it eliminated. The firewood sharing program has continued to operate since the closure, but all other programs run by the Community Trust have been shut down.

According to Larry Edgar, a volunteer who has been with the WoodShare program for the last eight years, there has been little to no communication from the Community Trust regarding their future plans. As a result the volunteers who work with the WoodShare program voted last fall to separate from the Community Trust. "We don't know what the Trust's future is and as a result we feel that we need to separate so that we can keep the WoodShare program going," said Edgar.

The North Hastings Community Trust web page says that they are not ready to resume working hours and are "re-imagining and planning for new ways to work in the community." When reached for comment regarding the WoodShare volunteers decision to leave the umbrella of the Community Trust, the chair of the collective, Lorie Bird, said in an email "I've been a WoodShare volunteer for several years and hope to continue to do so. I have a deep appreciation for the history of this project - people coming together to share wood to ensure we are all warm in the winter. On behalf of the Trust I wish everyone well moving forward. We respect this decision to re-organize in a way that feels good for the WoodShare team. We are honoured to have shared such an important history."

According to Edgar, the plan for the WoodShare program is to run it the same way it has always been run, but with a new phone number and web page that people can use to contact them for emergency firewood. They have set up a new board that consists of five volunteers, including Edgar, Ernst Grell, Alex Ibey, Steve Johnston, and Michael Dowdall. They are planning to be able to accept donations shortly by direct deposit, cheque, or e-transfer to Kawartha Credit Union. Grell, who has been volunteering for the last five years wants to remind people that the WoodShare program is for emergencies only and is not intended to be used as an ongoing source for heat.

Grell provided some statistics that outlined the need for emergency firewood in North Hastings. He said that the program generally provides one face cord of wood to anyone who needs it and so far this season, which began in October of 2024, they have delivered over 60 face-cord of wood and traveled over 2,300 kilometres. "This only accounts for the volunteer who is donating their own vehicle for the delivery. In most scenarios," says Grell "the support person who helps load and unload firewood, provides their own transportation to the WoodShare site, and to the delivery address. Most of our requests are urgent where the requester of firewood has very little or no wood. The average turnaround currently is under three days. Many times, deliveries or pick ups are completed the same day a request is made."

Often the quick turn around of deliveries puts quite a bit of strain on the volunteers, whose age, Grell says, averages around 70 years old. "That becomes a challenge for our volunteer base," said Grell "Our volunteer base is not huge." Grell and Edgar are both hoping to reach out into the community and be able to grow that volunteer base and attract some younger volunteers. As Edgar pointed out in an email "We are not funded by any agency and rely on donations of wood, processing equipment, volunteers, and money to operate. All donations are welcome."

Edgar and the other volunteers wanted to extend their heartfelt thanks for all the assistance that they have received over the years. Specifically they want to thank Freymond Lumber for providing the land they are located on, providing fire wood, and plowing out the site when they get really heavy snowfalls, Land Escapes for donating fire wood, Dan Ross of Four Seasons Firewood for donating his time and his processing equipment, and all the volunteers who have donated their time to help organize, move, stack, load, and deliver firewood.

For information about volunteer opportunities or to order emergency wood the WoodShare program can be reached by phone at 343-386-0107, online at woodshare.ca, or by email at admin@woodshare.ca.

To make a donation by e-transfer please use the following email: donate@woodshare.ca. Currently WoodShare is in the process of setting up as a registered not-for-profit, but they cannot issue charitable receipts as of yet. Please follow the web page for updates.