



Scott McKague (left), event director of the Woodstock Coldest Night of the Year, addresses the crowd at the event, which was launched at Old St. Paul's Anglican Church. Walkers took to the streets of Woodstock for two-kilometre and five-kilometre treks before enjoying some chili, courtesy of Operation Sharing's Bullwinkle's Eatery.

Coldest Night walks away with \$207,000

By Eric Schmiedl

In 2021, in the first outing for Woodstock's Coldest Night of the Year (CNOY), organizers initially hoped to raise \$20,000. This year, the event raised more than 10 times that much.

"It seems totally surreal. I've run out of words ...

it's just totally unbelievable," said Scott McKague, Woodstock event director. In the end, the event raised more than \$207,000 – the original goal this year was \$100,000. It was held in support of Operation Sharing's The Inn homeless shelter,

Continued on page 2

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Raising funds and awareness

Coldest Night walks away with \$207,000



President Craig Maw of Logikor, co-lead sponsor of the Woodstock Coldest Night of the Year fundraising event.

Continued from page 1 which runs daily starting at 7:30 p.m. at Old St. Paul's Anglican Church in Woodstock.

In the first year, the event was held virtually due to COVID-19. This time around, there were 401 walkers registered for the launch point at Old St. Paul's on Feb. 26, to take part in two-kilometre and five-kilometre walks through the streets of Woodstock. There were 67 registered teams and 43

volunteers.

The event is designed to raise funds and awareness surrounding homelessness. CNOY began in 2011 and this year there were 165 events in Canada and, for the first time, there were seven in the United States.

"It's amazing. There's a chance we might get most or all of the Lions clubs in Oxford to join up next year. It just keeps getting better and better," McKague said.

Even though the Woodstock event was far from the largest in terms of walkers – Kitchener was first with 720 walkers – Woodstock held on to the top spot in terms of donations for quite a while (the local walk ended up fourth overall in Canada).

McKague had a long list of people to thank.

"Thanks a million to Operation Sharing, Bullwinkle's (Eatery, which supplied chili for the walkers), the volunteers, and donors."

"Woodstock's CNOY 2022 was an amazing success!" said Shawn Shapton, Operation Sharing executive director.

"We are blown away by the incredible efforts led by Scott McKague and so many generous sponsors, walkers, and volunteers that came together to make this year's event our largest fundraiser ever.

"We walked in solidarity with thousands of other participants across Canada

"We walked in solidarity with thousands of other participants across Canada to show our support for those struggling with housing and shelter."

- Shawn Shapton, Operation Sharing executive director

to show our support for those struggling with housing and shelter. This event has not only raised funds for The Inn, it has brought our community together on a very divisive issue. With so much stress

and negativity not just in our community but across the world we put Woodstock on the map in a positive light. We are so thankful to be the recipient of these funds as we work towards a 24/7 shelter in 2022," Shapton said, adding he thanks Old St. Paul's for its 17 years of hosting The Inn.

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The Inn's colourful history

By Eric Schmiedl

The Inn homeless shelter has been a place for many to call home.

Originally the Inn Out of the Cold, the initial name for The Inn, before it went to year-round, seven-days-a-week operation in 2018. People have come to the shelter since its inception 17 years ago when Operation Sharing came in contact with Woodstock's Old St. Paul's Anglican Church about the concept. The church has hosted the homeless shelter ever since.

Woodstock's Gerald Skillings, 60, stayed at the shelter off-and-on for a stretch of close to a decade between 2010 and 2019. He now lives in an apartment and said the shelter was "very instrumental" in helping him get that housing.

"I like it a lot," he said of his current accommodations. Overall, he said, his experience at the shelter was great.

"I've never been steered wrong personally by the staff or volunteers." The Inn provided him with, among other things, a bed and an understanding of the shelter rules.

At one time the facility had a piano that he enjoyed. He was also an avid card player there.

Of his time being homeless, Skillings said: "It's tough. A person can become disoriented.

"There's a lot of loneliness in it. What it boils down to is a lot of loneliness ... the great burden of being homeless. I'm not saying it's the worst thing on the planet, but it's got to be ... in the top five.

"At my age, it has a tendency to wear a person

out. You don't have a couch and place to rest."

The shelter started in 2005 and initially had space for around 10 guests. In the early days, the shelter was a rough-and-ready kind of proposition. The guests slept on thin mats in one room and went to the YMCA for showers. In an adjacent room at the shelter (which later became the lounge) the volunteers made due without direct heat. They cuddled up under blankets, watching a small black-and-white television with rabbit ears that could only pick up the London station (a far cry from the widescreen set and vast array of DVDs that followed in later years). One lucky volunteer got to sleep on a three-legged, ratty old couch propped up against a wall so it wouldn't fall over.

One of the episodes from the early days involved one volunteer preparing to drive a guest, who was under mental distress, to the hospital. Another volunteer handled the guest's dog ... kind of. The growling dog, after being leashed to a chair, made a run for it and the volunteer held the chair in lion-tamer fashion. The volunteer was heard saying: "I need a bit of help here." It all worked out in the end.

Another memorable night took place on the evening of Dec. 24, 2013. The shelter received a police call asking if there was room for about 30 more guests (the shelter was already at capacity at the time). There had been a fire at the Westmount Motel and the police were looking for temporary accommodations for the people who had been staying there. Quickly, additional bed spaces were

Continued on page 4



*Old St. Paul's
Anglican
Church.*

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The Inn's colourful history

Continued from page 3

set up (with the help of some of the guests who had already been staying at the shelter) and the Westmount folks were welcomed in for a short but, hopefully, pleasant stay. It was 2018 when the shelter went from a six-months-a-year facility to a year-round location under coordinator Darryl Watson. A washer and dryer were added at around that time, along with shower facilities.

And who can forget when COVID-19 struck the shelter and the whole world? Two-metre spaces were made and taped out leading to the facility entrance to ensure physical distancing, hand washing stations were available, and masks and other measures came into play. Due to COVID health guidelines and restrictions, beds were reduced from 20 to 12. It was a challenge the shelter staff and volunteers were up to.

As of Jan. 17, 2022, a full guest lounge and a new staff lounge were added. That was on top of meals from several restaurants – including Operation Sharing's Bullwinkle's Eatery.

The facility also expanded to 25 beds thanks to support from the County of Oxford (the shelter's primary funder) and Old St. Paul's. In addition, the county has supported the idea of a 24/7 shelter model. Operation Sharing is thankful for the partnership over the years with the County of Oxford and Old St. Paul's ensuring a safe place for many to rest their head at night. Also part of The Inn picture these days is the addition of wraparound services from the Oxford County Community Health Centre, the Canadian Mental Health Association, and Thames Valley Addiction Services. It's part of being home to people who would otherwise not have one.

Shapton named executive director



**Shawn
Shapton**

Shawn Shapton is Operation Sharing's new executive director.

The organization's board gave the thumbs up to Shapton's appointment at its Feb. 24 meeting. Shapton had been acting executive director for several months.

"I look forward to leading the agency

into the next phase and working alongside so many incredible staff members and volunteers," Shapton said. "This role provides many opportunities to collaborate with other organizations in our community as we work to provide dignity and support to those that need it the most," he added.

Bullwinkle's

WOODSTOCK – Running out of College Avenue United Church, takeout lunches are available on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday (from

noon to 1 p.m.) at the Bullwinkle's Eatery.

People are asked to make a freewill donation.

Food for Friends

OXFORD COUNTY – Please

remember to contribute each time you shop at supporting grocery stores in Woodstock and Ingersoll through the year.

Your support is much appreciated.

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