

Pirates welcome at upcoming mystery dinner for autism

Written By **MARNI WALSH**

Shelburne's 'Autism Grandma,' Deanna Avison invites guests of the 4th annual Hearts Wide Open for Autism mystery dinner and auction to come dressed for the 'high seas.' The dinner theatre mystery will be Murder on the High Seas presented by theatrical performers from Murder for Hire.

'You aren't going to want to miss this hilarious murder mystery,' says Ms. Avison. Described as a sunny voyage that turns dark when the cruise ship 'The Grande Illusion' collides with a pirate ship named 'The Passing Wind,' the evening at the Shelburne Golf and Country Club is sure to be fun for all involved. Organizers suggest semi-formal wear, but encourage costumes including cruise wear, beach clothes, or traditional pirate garb if you want to blend in with Captain Pugwart and his crew.

Hearts Wide Open has raised over \$24,000 in the past three years with all profits donated to the Upper Grand Learning Foundation for the Special Education Program in Shelburne's local schools. Some of the items purchased with funds have included calming pillows, adjustable desks which allow children to either sit or stand, bean bag chairs, Hokki stools, noise-cancelling head phones, fidget tools, timers, sequencing activities and calming tools. Deanna Avison says, 'These items help children of all ages with special needs learn and manage their day at school.'

Ms. Avison was inspired to begin the fundraiser by her twin grandchildren with autism. 'What started out as a dream to make a difference for children with autism and other special needs,' she says, became a reality with Hearts Wide Open. 'Together we are making a big impact on these beautiful children by helping them learn easier, and overcome their fears and struggles at school with the devices that we supply with the funds raised.'

Deanna Avison says, 'Our wish is to bring respect, acceptance, understanding and support to those children with special needs. Statistics show to date that 1 in 48 children are diagnosed with autism. There is a significant number of autistic children and other special needs children living in Dufferin County who attend our local schools. The funds we raise are donated to the Upper Grand Learning Foundation and then distributed

to Shelburne's local schools. Although limited funds are provided by the Ministry of Education and School Board, there is always a need for specialized devices and aids for these children.'

This is the 4th year 'Murder for Hire,' a mystery theatre company out of Kitchener, has brought one of their entertaining mysteries to the event. 'It's a night of a lot of fun and laughs,' say the organizers, 'with the audience solving the case' and 'the Golf and Country club setting the scene while serving a delicious chicken dinner with all the trimmings.'

'We are very blessed to have generous sponsors again this year,' says Ms. Avison, including to name a few: Westjet; GP Carpentry; Shelburne Transporter; iPro Realty; Rawlco Services; Royal LePage 'the Mullin Group; Blackie's Storage; Lennox Farms; and Main Street Family Dental. The many wonderful silent auction items include exciting bids such as two nights at the Shamrock Lodge in Port Carling, and Westjet tickets for a chance to win one round trip ticket for two to any regularly scheduled destination. Westjet tickets are available for \$10 each through Deanna Avison by text: 519 806 6065 or at Vivid Hair Studio: 519 925 9500.

The Hearts Wide Open dinner, mystery and silent auction, in support of over 200 children in local schools with special needs, will take place on Saturday, April 6th at the Shelburne Golf and Country Club on 516423 County Rd. 124, just north of Shelburne. Cocktails and silent auction will start at 6 pm, with dinner and mystery at 7pm, followed by music by DJ Master Mix. Tickets at \$100 each, or a table of eight for \$700 are available on Facebook @HeartsWideOpenforAutism and at www.shelburnegolf.com. Ticket buyers may also contact Megan at Shelburne Golf and Country Club at 519 925 5581. Anyone interested in donating to the silent auction please contact - Deanna Avison by March 10th.