

Local residents rebrand Shelburne Welcome Wagon, excited to continue 90 year tradition

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Two Shelburne residents are looking to continue the Welcome Wagon, a 90 year old tradition that went bankrupt earlier this year, with a rebranding, now going by the name Shelburne Community Welcome.

"I thought it was really sad that what I got from Welcome Wagon wouldn't be given to the new people moving in," said Bella Carter, one of the organizers of the local program.

Shelburne Community Welcome, is a program organized by local co-volunteers Bella Carter and Sandra Gallagher. The program focuses on welcoming and connecting new residents to the Shelburne area with a visit to their home and a giving of a welcome basket with items donated by local businesses.

"It's really nice when you're in a community where you don't know anyone to receive something saying welcome, stay in touch," said Carter, touching on her own feelings of loneliness she experience after moving to Shelburne in 2018.

The Welcome Wagon was founded in the U.S in 1928 by marketing man Thomas Briggs. The concept of the Welcome Wagon was inspired from frontier settlers in the mid to late 1800's and their Conestoga "welcome wagons" that were a communal way of greeting westward travelers by providing fresh food and water for their journey.

"They were new, they didn't know what to do, they didn't have a home or house," said Carter. "They would bring them baked goods and things from the locals, the few other people that lived in town at the time."

According to the Welcome Wagon website, Briggs, while looking to "embody this same spirit of warm hospitality and welcome" hired women who were friendly and knowledgeable about their neighbourhood, and who would personally deliver gift baskets supplied by local businesses. The operation began in Canada in the 1930s and became a wholly Canadian company in 1979. The American part of the company stopped in-person visits in the 1998.

On May 4, after operating for 90 years in the local community, Welcome Wagon officially shut down.

Carter, who was asked to be a Welcome Wagon representative prior to its shut down, wanted to continue the tradition.

"This is something I like to do, meeting people and connecting," said Carter.

After recruiting Sandra Gallagher, who works with the Shelburne Rotary, Carter says that they both started contacting businesses who had their contracts with Welcome Wagon cancelled with the shutdown and other local vendors to become a part of the new Shelburne Community Welcome.

"They started coming on board and we're really excited," said Carter.

Shelburne Community Welcome has, at the time of print, 18 local businesses that are taking part in the program with others waiting on confirmation.

With an excel sheet full of names, Carter says they are hopeful to be back out giving baskets to new neighbours, and residents by fall.