

Dufferin Oaks to host tours and conversations for first Community Engagement Day

Written By SAM ODROWSKI

Dufferin Oaks in Shelburne is opening its doors to the public for an afternoon of tours, exhibits and conversation on Sept. 18 for Community Engagement Day.

Diane Whitten-Franks, administrator of Dufferin Oaks, said the day is meant to reinforce a simple message: residents don't stop being part of the community when they move into long-term care.

‘They remain parents, grandparents, neighbours, volunteers, mentors, and friends,’ she said, adding that the relationships residents keep with family, friends and local organizations play a real role in their well-being.

The event runs from 2 to 4 p.m. at the long-term care home, and is open to the public, though attendees were asked to RSVP by Sept. 4 so staff could plan for food and space. However, Whitten-Franks said anyone who missed the RSVP window is still welcome to stop by.

The afternoon will open with remarks from Whitten-Franks, Dufferin Oaks CAO, and a representative from Family Council. Attendees can expect information tables, an exhibit from the Museum of Dufferin, guided tours of the home, and a presentation on Dufferin Oaks' departments and services. Light refreshments will be provided by Destined to Bake, the home's on-site café operator.

Whitten-Franks said the Museum of Dufferin display, which will include photos tracing the home's history, is likely to be a highlight of the day, along with the tours.

Dufferin Oaks houses 160 people, and Whitten-Franks said community visits, whether from a daycare group, a choir or a volunteer dropping in for a chat, add variety and a sense of normalcy to daily life at the home.

‘It gives residents opportunities to meet different people, have new experiences and stay connected to what is happening outside of Dufferin Oaks,’ she said.

Among the home's regular partners are the Shelburne Public Library, which brings in books for residents to borrow, and the Museum of Dufferin, which periodically sets up historical displays that Whitten-Franks said tend to spark conversation and old memories.

EarlyON and Highland Daycare visits give residents time with younger children, while the United Church, Abiding Place Ministry and the Seventh-Day Adventist Choir are among the faith groups that visit regularly. The Pine River Choir and other entertainers also perform at the home, alongside monthly music therapy sessions and physiotherapy services.

Whitten-Franks pointed to residents who were once teachers as an example of how those visits can land.

‘A few of our residents have been teachers, and you see that when the children come into the home, that really brings that teacher history back out in them,’ she said.

Halloween is one of the more anticipated visits of the year, when children from local daycares come through the home in costume.

‘That's not only for the residents, but the staff here ? it's one of our favourite days,’ Whitten-Franks said.

Therapy animal visits draw a similar response.

Whitten-Franks recalled a resident moved to tears during a recent puppy visit.

?She was just so happy to hold the puppy and have that experience,? she said, adding that staff feel it too. ?It's so rewarding. When you see them crying, it brings tears to your eyes too.?

As a county-run home, Dufferin Oaks depends on support from Dufferin County council and local ratepayers, Whitten-Franks said. She noted that long-term care homes across the province are managing increasingly complex resident needs alongside workforce and funding pressures. Despite that, she said the county remains committed to delivering compassionate, high-quality care.

Whitten-Franks said she hopes the event pushes back on a narrow public picture of long-term care. She said media coverage tends to focus on the rare cases where something goes wrong, often missing the day-to-day relationships built by nurses, personal support workers, dietary and housekeeping staff, recreation staff and others.

?They come to work each day determined to make a positive difference in residents' lives,? Whitten-Franks said.

This is the first year Dufferin Oaks has hosted Community Engagement Day. Whitten-Franks said the turnout will help shape how the home approaches the event in future years.