

Warkworth Legion spreads cheer at Sunnybrook

T.J. LEBLANC
tleblanc@northumberlandnews.com

WARKWORTH — Remembrance Day has come and gone and now the Christmas season has brought with it a reminder of the good deeds done through the Legion poppy fund.

As in years past, the Warkworth Legion set out on a mission to bring Christmas cheer to veterans at Sunnybrook Hospital in Toronto by presenting them gifts and good tidings.

On Dec. 10, nine legion members and two students from East Northumberland Secondary School made their way to Toronto to visit 29 veterans, ranging in age from their early 80s to their late 90s, to present them with a holiday gift. Each recipient was given a parcel containing toiletries, a box of Kleenex, toothbrushes, toothpaste, body wash and body cream.

"We bought large print puzzles and a pen and Bloomers Chocolate Factory donated a box of meltaways for each bag," said Trudy Nelson, Membership Chair at the Warkworth Legion for almost five years.

According to Ms. Nelson, the veterans were thrilled to see the group and, in some cases, were quite emotional.

"I don't know if the veterans knew we were coming or not, but they were elated to see us," she said. "The last two years we had a ward where most of the patients had dementia. This year I had requested a ward where we

could communicate a little more and have a visit. They were very emotional and very appreciative."

This year, some of the residents of Sunnybrook even noticed they had something in common with their visitors.

"There were a couple of legion members who had served in the military and there was one patient who noticed medals on one of the members and of course they had a conversation," Ms. Nelson said.

Initiated in the mid-90s, the visit to Sunnybrook remains an integral part of the Christmas season at the Warkworth Legion.

"(Today) it remains basically the same program as originated. The collection of a few gifts for the veterans taken to the hospital for distribution by members of Warkworth Legion, and presented by the members to the veterans," said Service Bureau Officer, Roger Brummell, who has been involved in the tradition since its inception.

In 2006, approximately 10 years after it started, the tradition came to an end. Mr. Brummell says an illness, in addition to a lack of interest, resulted in the veteran visits being put on hold. A couple of years later the flame was reignited and Warkworth Legion members once again set out to bring Christmas greetings to the aging veterans.

"That's what the legion is all about. The originality of the legion was to do with vets. The money that was raised from the poppy campaign was to be used for vets, so it just

comes natural to go that route," Ms. Nelson said. "Diane Frederick and I organize it and we do the shopping and prepare the parcels."

With the third year of the project under her belt, Ms. Nelson says she hopes to do this

again next year as the experience is irreplaceable.

"I guess it's something that you have to really experience yourself to understand how really rewarding it is," she said.

Colborne woman decks the halls

T.J. LEBLANC
tleblanc@northumberlandnews.com

COLBORNE — Little toy houses all covered in snow, little toy reindeer with Santa in tow. This is what you see when you walk into Norma Crockett's house in Colborne.

Almost every surface is decked out for the holidays. Poinsettia table cloths, tinsel and garland draped across ceilings, paper Santa and his reindeer dance across the walls.

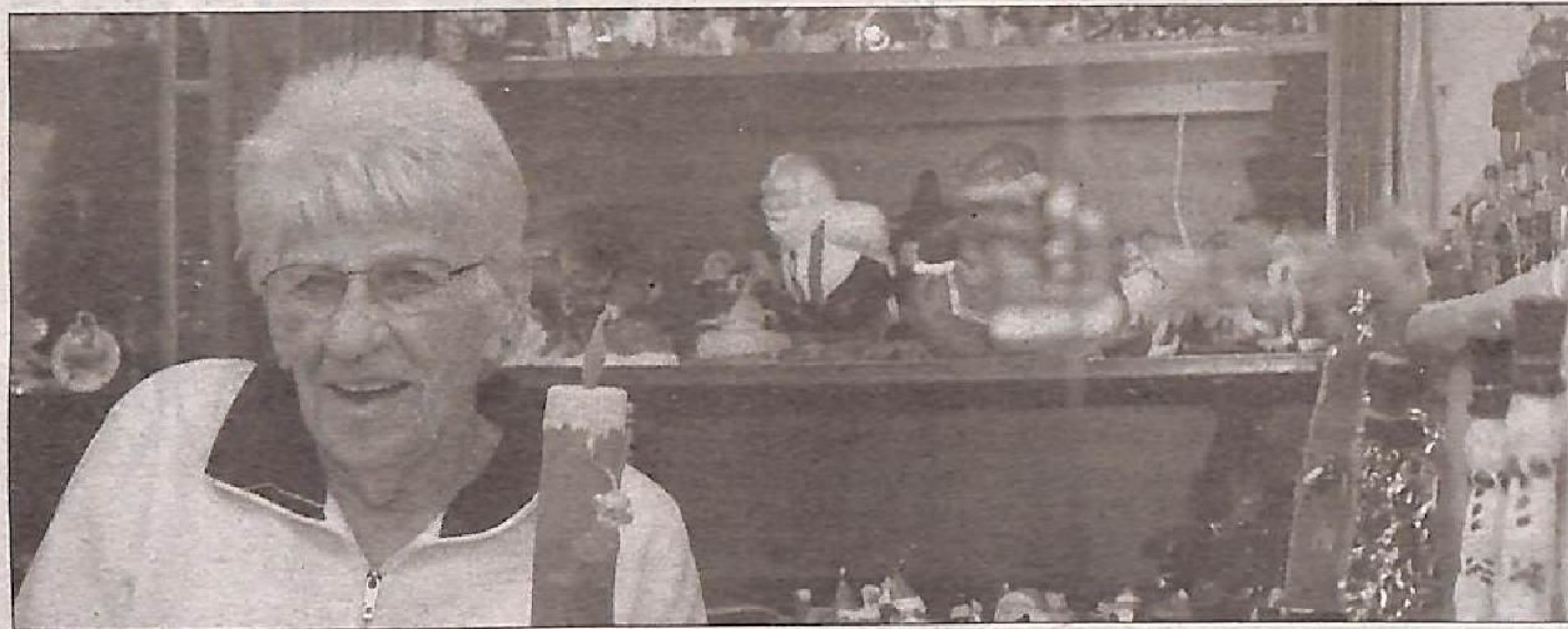
There are even Christmas candy jars filled with red and green candies on the dining room table. If all of this is not enough, walk into Ms. Crockett's living room to know she takes Christmas stuff pretty seriously.

"I always decorated, but not as much as I do here. It just keeps growing," Ms. Crockett said.

"I start the day after Halloween. It used to take me maybe a week, but now it takes me three weeks to a month."

It's no surprise it takes her so long to decorate considering the fact that she is 75 and lugs more than 30 storage bins from her basement each year.

"There's about thirty bins and two freezers. This basement is stone



T.J. LEBLANC / THE INDEPENDENT

COLBORNE — Norma Crockett has more Christmas decorations than Santa could shake a stick at and she fills her home with them each and every year.

foundation so you have to have them in bins," she said, explaining her meticulous packaging that includes the use of two old inoperable freezers. "I put the musical ones in the freezer so they don't get damp."

Ms. Crockett's main floor is filled to capacity with decorations of all shapes and sizes. White Christmas teddy bears line the back of her couch and spill out onto the floor, ornaments hang in doorways, on the tree, and in the windows,

and hundreds of houses and figurines fill more than half of her dining room. An entire Christmas village has been carefully arranged on two homemade tables, complete with a flying Santa Claus swooping through the town.

"(My husband) used to say, 'you don't need anymore,' and then he would come back from the store with more pieces," Ms. Crockett's remembers fondly. "I love Christmas, I have since I was a child."

But not every Christmas has been

wonderful for Ms. Crockett.

"It will be eight years April... my husband was in Toronto that Christmas... he never made it home. He went in the 13th of December and he passed away April 2nd. He had bypass heart surgery and his lungs couldn't take it. That was the hardest Christmas," she remembers tearfully.

Since then Christmas has been a little different for the mother of five, grandma to 10 and great-grandma to nine.

"Christmas has changed since then, but with the great grandkids around so small you make it happy. It's just different," she said.

The memories are everywhere. Decorations brought home in mittened hands by children and grandchildren, painted figurines and glued together wreaths of all shapes and sizes.

Some are new and some are old, but out of the thousands of decorations within those walls, Ms. Crockett says she has two favourites.

"My oldest decoration, my daughter Wendy says 'Christmas isn't until this one comes out, it's over 40 years old,' she says as she pulls it from the kitchen shelf.

The velvet covered plastic candle with a plastic little elf pinned on the side has faded from its once crimson red and forest green to more muted colours, a memory of Christmases past.

But her favourite of all is a simple piece of paper hung on the tree by her grandchildren years ago. Carefully folded into a neat little square, the piece of Christmas wrap has been decorated with ribbon and a little poem asking Grandma not to open that very special gift, because there's love inside.