

'IT'S A REAL HUMBLE HONOUR': PASTOR RAY VANDER KOOIJ NAMED ACTON 2018 CITIZEN OF THE YEAR

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For the past 15 years, Pastor Ray Vander Kooij has been a catalyst and connector for those in need in his community.

Serving as the pastor of Bethel Church in Acton has allowed Vander Kooij to be involved with members of the church and community in a number of capacities, from providing individuals with networking opportunities, to addressing social issues, to fostering togetherness and belonging.

The major initiative he has been spearheading over the past few years is the housing task force of the Community Support Network, of which he is also a member of the lead team. The network seeks to move

forward the social pillar of the sustainability plan of Halton Hills, Vander Kooij says.

Vander Kooij has since been maintaining a primary role in addressing the lack of affordable housing in Acton.

"It grew in some ways from our church having a real heart to see the issues of youth homelessness addressed in the community, but then seeing the whole spectrum of needs in the community in terms of housing," he said.

Vander Kooij organizes forums and creates networking opportunities to provide community members with the knowledge and resources to be able to see housing through a new lens, he said.

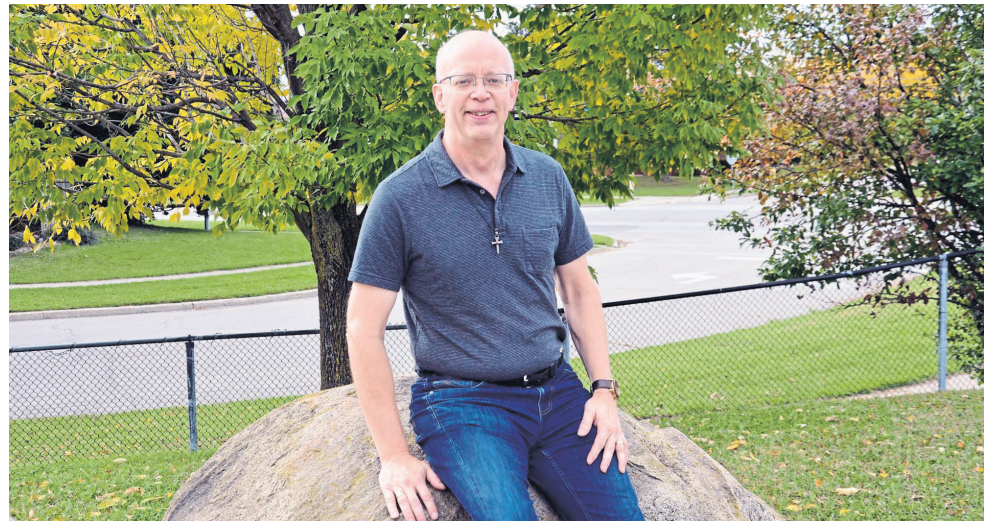
This includes familiarizing residents with various

options when it comes to housing, such as cohousing, homeshares and secondary units.

"It's about having actual opportunities to share and having light bulbs go off. Having people in the community see things differently and be a loving neighbour, caring for the common good," he said. "There's dignity in any living setting and just having that lens, living with the current realities, that's so important."

Alongside his duties with Community Support Network, Vander Kooij is a member of the Acton Together Committee, Bethel Church's Vacation Bible School and the Community Acton Initiative Refugee Sponsorship (CAIRS) team.

Vander Kooij says though much of his work is



Veronica Appia/Metroland

Pastor Ray Vander Kooij will receive the Acton Citizen of the Year award at a dinner held in his honour on Oct. 16.

systemic and involves networking, he cherishes the moments where he gets to work directly with those in need.

"I value the opportunities where I do get to connect with people personally because they reach out through the church for help and are in a difficult situation," he said. "To be able to provide some hope and help."

Vander Kooij says being named Citizen of the Year really puts the work he does into perspective.

"For me it's a real humble honour to have the ways that I've been seeking to really reach out in the community and make a difference be appreciated and recognized, not that I do this for appreciation or recognition, but it kind of indicates that what I've longed for in my heart to

be doing, is happening," he said. "In that way, it's affirming, in terms of making the community a better place."

Vander Kooij will receive the Citizen of the Year Award at a dinner held in his honour on Oct. 16. The dinner will take place at the Acton Town Hall Centre (19 Willow St. N., Acton, ON L7J 1Z6). Cocktails will begin at 6:30 p.m. and dinner will follow at 7:15 p.m.

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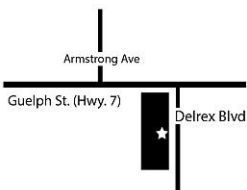
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