

Public demand brings house back on tour

By STEPHANIE THIESSEN
The Champion

Outside, it was a winter wonderland. The snow fell as if on cue, and Victoria Park looked every bit as magical as it usually does December 25.

But inside the Kocher home across the street, it was anything but a normal Christmas.

Sure, there was a Christmas tree and a few decorations inside the Victorian Mary Street residence, but for a home normally bedecked in holiday decor — including often five or six trees — the surroundings seemed rather plain.

Fortunately, the happiness on the faces of the couple inside brightened up the rooms and seemed to swallow up whatever might have been lacking.

After a fire had ripped through their beloved historical home nine months earlier, Caroline and Andrew Kocher had finally returned — just in time for Christmas. Most of their stored decorations had been reduced to ashes, explaining the simpler décor, but the couple made do.

“The joy of being at home was the priority, and having family and friends around to celebrate the festive season,” Ms Kocher said.

As the holiday season approaches once again, Ms Kocher can't help but remember that special Christmas two years ago in their newly re-built home.

This Christmas, she said she's looking forward to throwing open the doors of the home and welcoming the community as one of the stops on the United Way's Christmas House Tour — just as she did in 2001, before the fire.

Its seems many townfolk are interested in getting a peek inside.

Christy Babcock, volunteer chair of the house tour, said it's partly because of the community that the house is once again being included in the tour.

“The United Way of Milton received many requests that the new Kocher residence be included as part of the Christmas House Tour,” she said. “Many Milton residents who have expressed an interest in seeing how this beautiful home has been reconstructed will now have the opportunity.”



Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Participants of the United Way's Christmas House Tour will get a look inside this reconstructed historic home on Mary Street.

Although the Friday and Saturday limo bus tours are sold out, tickets are still available for Saturday's self-directed tour, which runs from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tickets cost \$25 each.

The Kochers purchased the house in 1998. It had been built in 1888 for Hugh

Campbell, a justice of the peace.

Ms Kocher said as soon as she set foot in the historical home, she knew she was meant to live in it.

“It was the home I had always been looking for.”

But on March 7, 2003, Mr. Kocher

awakened to a sounding alarm and was nearly choked by smoke that was quickly filling the house, Ms Kocher recounted.

She was in Florida at the time.

Ms Kocher said her husband knew he couldn't get down the stairs to the door, so he crawled out the window onto the roof and started yelling for someone to call 911.

He jumped from the roof, and fortunately sustained no life-threatening injuries.

When Ms Kocher received the news, all she cared about was that her husband was safe, she said.

“I thought, at least I can hear his voice. He's alive, we can deal with everything else later.”

It was devastating, though, to lose so many personal possessions like collectibles, mementoes from their wedding and photos, she said.

The fire had been caused by electrical problems in the basement. Flames had torn through most of the front part of the house, but the rest had suffered smoke damage, Ms Kocher said.

The couple was told the house would
• see OLD on page A25

Volunteers to have their say at event

Local volunteers will have a chance to share their thoughts on volunteerism at upcoming community dialogues hosted by the Regional Chairman's Citizens' Roundtable.

The events, which will take place this Saturday as well as December 1 in Milton, are part of a series of dialogues being held across the region that will gather the perspectives of diverse stakeholders from the non-profit community.

“As one of the three pillars of society alongside government and private enterprise, the non-profit and voluntary sector is essential to the health and well-being of any community,” said Regional Chairman Joyce Savoline.

“However, over the past several years, it has become increasingly clear that many non-profit organizations are facing real challenges around personnel shortages and raising the necessary funds to deliver their programs and services. The Citizens' Roundtable community dialogues give the

community the opportunity to share their experiences to aid in the development of recommendations to support Halton's valued voluntary sector.”

Ms Savoline convened the roundtable group to engage the community on the challenges facing Halton's non-profit and voluntary organizations regarding funding and diminishing resources.

It was established in direct response to a recommendation from the 'Funding Matters: A Warning and an Opportunity' symposium, which was hosted by Community Development Halton in November 2003.

The roundtable, which is made up of key contributors to the Halton community, began meeting in June 2005 to develop a work plan to look at the infrastructure needed to support Halton's non-profit agencies.

It'll also look at the funding system and structure that exists in Halton and the importance and impact of the non-profit

sector to Halton's economy and quality of life.

The dialogues on volunteerism will be held at the Milton Seniors' Activity Centre Saturday and the Halton Region Museum December 1, both from 9:30 to 11 a.m.

Volunteers interested in contributing their thoughts and ideas on volunteering in Halton are encouraged to contact (905) 825-6000, ext. 7901, to reserve a spot.

Additional dialogue sessions examining other aspects of the initiative will be announced next year.

The results of the community dialogues will form part of a background document for a community forum to be held in the spring.

The forum will be an opportunity for the broader community to collaborate on recommendations and strategies to sustain the valuable contribution of Halton's non-profit and voluntary organizations.

A report to regional council on the topic is expected in September 2006.

HaltonSearch.com

Sparkle LOOK ...for your Halton Hills Fine Jewellery Flyer

in Today's Canadian Champion!
Selected Areas Only

HALTON HILLS Fine Jewellery

218 Main St. E., Milton,
(905) 875-2999

WINNER CHOICE AWARDS 2005

FABRICLAND Holiday Sparkle!

Fashion, Home Decor, Gift-Giving Ideas and more!

PANNE VELOUR & VELVETS from 3.99m

ARCTIC FLEECE Solids & Prints from 5.99 & 7.99m

CHRISTMAS PRINTS from 2.22m

GLITTER & METALLICS from 4.99m

Entire In-Store Stock! OLFA™ CUTTING BOARDS & CUTTERS All 35% Off Our Regular Prices

Sewing Club Members save 50% off our regular prices everyday on Creations® Drapery Hardware!

NOVEMBER 14-20 Entire In-Store Stock! **SIMPLICITY PATTERNS ONLY 1.99 ea.** While quantities last. Not valid with any other discounts.

Sale in effect November 7-27, 2005. See our flyer for full details.

547 Main St. E. MILTON 878-0931