

Compassion, hard work recognized

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"She's aware of the circumstances that put people in poverty because she hears so many people's stories. A lot of people probably don't understand the dynamics of poverty the way she does."

For the past two years, Boutette has been able to help the food bank in his own way by representing his two parishes in Lakeshore's annual Polar Bear Splash that forwards all its proceeds to the food bank.

In that time, Boutette has seen how Clifford has been able to motivate the business community into supporting her cause.

"People are very aware of her compassion," he said. "She's got wide-ranging support."

Receiving no government funding for the food bank, Clifford has put her faith in support from local residents.

"They're wonderful," she says of the community.

The food bank serves a

healthy diet to about 150 families per week. Clifford says the need is stronger now than ever, with layoffs at Windsor's Big Three automotive plants trickling down their effects to smaller feeder plants in the county.

"Once there's a problem in the industry, it's the little guys who are going to have a hard time," Clifford said. "It's not a good situation. When you get both a mom and a dad coming in and they're both on unemployment, that's hard on the kids. I feel for the kids, that's why I work so hard. I'm the world's greatest beggar and I've been very blessed."

Clifford has been a recipient of the Queen's Gold Medal and was named the Essex Citizen of the Year for her ongoing efforts with the food bank.

On Feb. 21 at the U of W's Vanier Hall, she will be joined by her husband Ed and the food bank's 40 volunteers in accepting the social justice award.



Eileen and Ed Clifford are honoured that the Essex Area Food Bank was selected as the winner of the Centre for Studies in Social Justice's project of the year award. Each year a person or project is honoured for making an effort to improve the lot of oppressed or marginalized people.

Small libraries under review

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Those views were not all shared by the staff of the small libraries, who "vigorously defended" these branches, according to the report.

"The ability to serve seniors and children who are within walking distance of the libraries was repeatedly stressed," the report states. "In some cases, it was also felt that future population growth in the hamlets would increasingly justify maintaining the small branches."

The issue is not a new one for the Town of Essex, which has already faced the closure threat in relation to the small library in McGregor.

"Originally, the library board singled out the McGregor library. That was totally unfair. We told them to look at all the branches," said Deputy Mayor Richard Meloche, who also represents Ward 2.

"They said Essex has three libraries, but those libraries serve three different urban areas. You should have libraries where the people are," said Meloche, who maintains that the

McGregor library is not large enough and is outdated.

"We need to look at that - expand - let's build it larger," he said.

As a result of discussions about McGregor's library needs, Meloche said the town has started to budget \$50,000 a year to be placed in a reserve fund as a show of support for an expanded facility. The facility needs to be larger to accommodate the needs of the community and should add a French language section and more computers, he said.

Edward George, chief librarian for Essex County Library, acknowledged that closing smaller library branches "is one of the issues" addressed in the study, but noted that the draft report does not include recommendations.

"It is really at the very early stage. Public meetings have not been scheduled yet," said George. "It is part of a much larger study."

"It is months and months away," said George, speaking of recommendations that will be drafted in a final report, which will include input received

from public meetings.

George said there were many other factors to consider in determining the future of the 14 library branches and the library-delivery service in Essex County, including population growth and new technology.

The draft consultation report also contains the results of an online library user survey, completed by 406 respondents, a random selection of library patrons.

The majority of participants, over 92 percent, completed the survey at the library closest to their place of residence.

When asked what would encourage them to use a library branch more often, participants asked for an increase in the hours of operation, a wider selection of materials, adult programming, more public workstations, more programs for children, and Sunday openings.

Environmental Farm Plan workshop

The Essex Soil and Crop Improvement Association will be holding an Ontario Environmental Farm Plan workshop on Wednesday, Feb. 14 starting at 9 a.m. at the Essex Civic Centre, Room C, 360 Fairview Ave. W., Essex.

Environmental Farm Plans are assessments voluntarily prepared by farm families to increase their environmental awareness in up to 23 different areas. Through the local workshop process, farmers highlight their farm's environmental strengths, identify areas of concern, and set realistic action plans with timetables to improve environmental conditions.

Environmental cost-share programs are available to assist in implementing the projects.

For more information, contact Ernie Konrad at 519-825-4588.

Correction:

In the last issue of the Essex Free Press we reported that Essex Police Sgt. Gary Gamberta spoke to members of the Essex Retirees' Social Club about phone scams and con artists. Gamberta actually spoke to members of the Essex Ladies Take a Break program.

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