

Lemonville gets lift from little church's big project

At Lemonville United Church, 135236 McCowan Rd. in Whitchurch-Stouffville, a 2013 resolution will soon become a new year's achievement.

For the elderly, the infirm and the disabled, a push-button elevator has been installed that, as early as next month, will be activated.

The modern-day lift will replace the 22-step "stairway to heaven" that, for some, had become an understandable reason for non-attendance at Sunday morning worship and other functions within "the little white church on the hill".

Eighteen months ago, the board of managers, headed by retired professional engineer Bob Curgenven along with members Bruce Niven, Don Zwicker and Don Miller decided something had to be done to improve access to a lower-level hall and an upper level sanctuary.

"Like most churches, ours is an aging population. Some couldn't cope with the steps outside. We had to do something or risk losing several parishioners," Mr. Curgenven said.

In addition, he explained, the job of carrying hot bowls of soup,



Roaming Around

with Jim Thomas

and chili up two flights of stairs had become extremely risky.

However, before construction could begin, considerable ground work was required. With the appointment of a sub-committee, pieces began falling into place. Stouffville architect Bruce Arrow-smith was hired. Financial requirements had to be considered and permits requested.

"Co-operation was wonderful," Mr Curgenven said.

From four tendered bids, the firm of Barry Doner Custom Carpentry Ltd. of Oshawa was the lowest with

a round-figure price of \$200,000. The end result, "a fabulous job", the board chairperson agrees.

The elevator will accommodate up to five people at a time or one wheelchair and several helpers. Two washrooms have also been installed, one on each floor.

Major excavation leading up to the church was required but the adjoining cemetery was not disturbed. An electrically heated walkway will keep the elevator entrance clear of ice and snow.

"The site was properly surveyed in advance," the chairperson said. The septic system has also been replaced.

"It's all very pleasing to the eye," Mr. Curgenven said. "One would think it had been there forever."

A final stamp of approval is expected in the next couple of weeks. A ceremony marking the project's completion is already planned with former interim pastor, Rev. Bill Fritz, an invited guest along with town mayor Wayne Emmerson and Ward 3 Councillor Clyde Smith.

With respect to fundraising, a \$70,000 figure was set for the congregation with \$60,000 already received, member Marion Wells said.

"Everyone got on board," she

said, "it's been amazing." A pig roast held at the nearby community centre last summer put a large dent in the debt. Several additional fundraisers have also helped, said Mrs. Wells.

She honestly admits that many, including herself, were initially concerned at what appeared to be an awesome expense. "It seemed like a pretty big effort for a congregation our size," she said, "but everyone was committed and very generous." She praised the work of contractor Barry Doner, describing the completed project as "excellent".

Lemonville church, built back in the late 1850s, was closed for several years but re-opened in 1961, to the amazement of the presbytery.

"So many country churches were closing their doors back then, but ours re-opened," Mrs. Wells said, "and we're still going strong."

What pleases her greatly about the elevator project is the fact the property, from the road, appears little changed.

"We're now the extended little white church on the hill," she said.

Diane Ward, clerk of session, is ecstatic concerning the outpouring of support, not only by the congregation but the entire community.

"It's been exciting, heartwarming," she says. "I'm also flabbergasted at how much fun it's all been."

She agrees with Mr. Curgenven that, for some members, coping with the steep outside stairs, had become a hardship.

"There were some who wanted to attend, (Sunday worship), but couldn't," she said.

The only thing holding up final approval is a need to have the elevator fireproofed, Ms Ward explained, a delay she finds "frustrating".

Earlier, it was hoped all would be ready by Christmas.

Jean Nauta, a long-time member, said that, like Mrs. Wells, she too was somewhat concerned when told of the cost. But she soon changed her mind.

"It's not for any one of us but eventually for all of us," she said. To add impetus to the project, she noted no objections had been voiced.

"There's been no dissension," she stated.

Says Bob Curgenven: "I'm looking forward to a quieter new year."

Jim Thomas is a Stouffville resident who has written for area newspapers for more than 60 years.

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