**SI THUNDER BAY’S CELEBRATION TO MARK THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL – SEPTEMBER 18, 2021**

by Karen Bortolin, Anniversary Committee Chair

The ladies on the Anniversary Committee all stepped up by taking on the many tasks and seeing them through. The committee was made up of Linda Adams, Judy Anderson, Marlene Crago, Karen Lynn Evans, Sharon Godwin, Kim Koivukoski, and Lee Ann Nalezyty. I could not have asked for a better group to work with. As it turned out planning a September event over the summer was challenging and, of course, there was that pesty Covid thing to deal with.

All of the planning and a beautiful day led to a happy afternoon for all. We were grateful that Mayor Bill Mauro and City Counsellor Rebecca Johnson were able to join us. President Cheryl spoke about the beginnings of SI and the start of the local club. I spoke about our local club’s community impact and the global impact of SI. What a wonderful surprise it was for us when a former award winner (for both Thunder Bay and Eastern Canada Region) just happened to be out for a walk in the garden. It was so nice of her to speak and let us know what a difference SI made in her life.

President Cheryl must have been a historian in a previous life; she looked up the history of SI, the beginnings of our Thunder Bay club, and found out all she could about our 15 members that are remembered with a tree in the Memorial Grove. We thank her for the time she took to do that, for speaking at the event, and for leading the memorial tree watering tribute. Thank you also to Maxine Tenander for doing the welcoming and introduction of guest speakers. Maxine also spoke about the history of Soroptimist International Friendship Gardens.

SI Thunder Bay has had a very bright past and we follow in the footsteps of some incredible women. As part of our celebration we honoured the 15 incredible Soroptimist members who have a tree planted for them in the Garden’s Soroptimist Memorial Grove. A giant blue ribbon was tied around each tree, and as President Cheryl read a short bio for each women, we watered their tree.

SI Thunder Bay’s celebration of the 100th Anniversary is going to be featured in our local newspaper’s annual “Women” magazine insert. The newspaper sent a photographer to the event and sent a reporter to interview a group of members in the middle of October. We are really looking forward to the publication of the magazine.

**SI THUNDER BAY’S COMMUNITY IMPACT**

When asked what Soroptimists do, you could say that “in a nutshell” we raise money then give it away.

Our club is in the process of becoming a registered charity and by doing so we will be able to direct the proceeds from any raffle related fundraising we do to our club’s own projects. The signature projects of Soroptimists worldwide are the Dream Programs – “Live Your Dream” and “Dream It, Be It”. The Soroptimist mission is education, empowerment and enabling opportunities which is exactly what the Dream programs do.

“Live Your Dream” provides a bursary to a deserving single mother who has gone back to school. We have occasionally been a financial position to offer a first and second place award, and we would love to be able to do this every year.

“Dream It, Be It” is a program for female students. For our club this has meant putting on workshops in schools. The workshops stress the importance of education and open girl’s eyes to career opportunities. This year in order to honour the Soroptimist 100th Anniversary we provided three $100 bursaries to a graduating Grade 8 girl at each of the three schools where a DIBI session was previously held.

This year, to recognize the 100th anniversary, we also created 100 Comfort Kits instead of our usual 50. For the past seven years our club has provided “Comfort Kits” for homeless or destitute women. The Comfort Kits are a shopping bag full of personal care items. The kits are distributed by Superior Points and the Thunder Bay District Health Unit.

SI Thunder Bay has been around for 70 years and over the years we have supported many organizations and projects. They are listed by the amount of monetary support starting with the highest one. Donations to the top 9 alone total $165,000 and there were so many more.

1. Thunder Bay Regional Hospital – $85,000 (primarily directed to the Sexual Assault & Domestic Violence Unit but there were also donations to the Renal Unit and Cat Scan).
2. Northern Cancer Research Foundation - $21,000
3. Therapeutic Riding Association - $17,300
4. 55 Plus Centre Wellness Room - $10,000
5. Thunder Bay Public Library - $7,000
6. VON (Victorian Order of Nurses) Foot Care Program - $6,000
7. Isthmus (formerly Blessings in a Backpack) - $5,500
8. Elevate (formerly Aids Thunder Bay) - $4,750
9. Faye Peterson Women’s Shelter - $4,000

We need to keep in mind that money donated isn’t the only measure of success. It is not just what we donated to other groups, but what we accomplished ourselves with initiative and determination. Our club provide seed money for the Meals on Wheels program in 1968 and for the VON’s foot care program in 1979, and, of course, our enduring legacy is our club’s 1967 Centennial Project - the Soroptimist International Friendship Garden.

We will never know what the true amount of the community impact worldwide would be, since every club is free to support whatever cause they choose. But, if those clubs are anything like ours – just imagine! There are Soroptimist Clubs in 126 countries around the world. When you hear of the impact of our club alone on our community then multiply that by 1,600 clubs worldwide, it boggles the mind to think of our worldwide collective impact actually could be!