



Alice Kummer makes a presentation about her wood carving as Sundial owners Rob and Ben Oppenaur look on.

ATHENS CONNECT

By Sally Smid

A local Women's Breakfast speaker related how she had followed through with a vision to start a home to help young single mothers. She challenged the audience to consider how they might make a difference in their own communities. Realizing that the local food bank has more clients per capita than Ottawa, several had the idea of an Athens "drop in centre". The increased senior population, youth concerns and financial and medical hardships were also part of the group's motivation. The owners of Sundial Secondhand -Rob & Ben Oppenaur had long realized local needs as many customers, looking for affordable items, frequent the store and the "The Oppenaur's" recently decided to give a portion of sales to the Athens Food Bank. They offered the front of their store for the purpose of "coffee and chats" and an information kiosk, as well as a

variety of presentations to help inform locals about various events and what community organizations are available to offer help.

On April 12th 2016, Athens Connect was launched with a ribbon cutting ceremony and social. The Organizers realized that there are many in this rural community in need of information, friendship, support, encouragement or just "a warm place to sit". Others are excited about providing understanding, assistance, and advocacy for their neighbours. Many are unaware of agencies and supports that are available.

Athens Connect offers coffee and chat times on Tuesdays and a variety of events on Fridays from 9:30 - 11:30 each week. There have been a variety of topics and presentations including; "Art Splash", hobbies, "coffee with a township councillor", environmental help,

developmental challenges, our Community Garden, "Every Kid in the Community", 4-H, CPHC and the Family Health Team. Media coverage often helps the community at large to "connect" with such topics as well. Many have been finding out a lot more about their community and really enjoy connecting with their neighbours in a safe and positive setting.

A Community Garden organizer mentioned after her visit, "I felt encouraged by the interest and support shown at Connect!"

This past summer there were children who found it was a place where they could drop in and work on a puzzle or do some drawing or painting. Others have been volunteering and some just find out it is a good place to find a listening ear and an understanding friend.

The kiosk has helped visitors access tourism information and a variety of medical and financial helps. Athens Connects goal is to be a place where those with challenges or dealing with discouragement can gain more empowerment and move forward with a brighter outlook. Some visitors have reported that they have received support in some way and are now able to "pay it forward"! As one organizer explained, "there are many reasons why someone might need to rely on the Food Bank or social assistance.

Perhaps due to a job lay off, illness, depression, aging, or some other financially debilitating reason. It is not fair to assume that just because someone is in need of assistance they lack responsibility or motivation."

Attendees agree that Athens is a great place to live -- a friendly and caring community! Athens Connects vision is to help make it a greater place!

Athens Connect begins a new season this fall with a new series of topics and possibilities. Everyone is welcome! **LH**



Organizers cut the ribbon at Sundial Secondhand on Main St. in Athens and launch Athens Connect.



Jamie Chapman of Athens CPHC makes a presentation about local services available.