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YOUR COMMUNITY

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Building honours foster family stars

By: Amanda Persico

Two unsung community heroes got their time in the spotlight with the dedication of a new building.

For more than 30 years, Newmarket's Frank and Jane Kennedy were foster parents to about 100 children and the York Region Children's Aid Society honoured the couple last week with the opening of Kennedy Place.

The building, at 16915 Leslie St., is owned by the York Region CAS and provides a permanent home for families, executive director Patrick Lake said.

"Long-term stability is the most important type of care. The best a community can offer a child is a home," he said.

"The Kennedys are a reflection of that stability and the foster care system."

The building also signifies a new partnership with the different CAS branches and the province, which allows for more cohesive action to change legislation.

Although the weather was the same a mere 10 months ago, cold and windy, York CAS president Barkat Kara said this ceremony marked the end of a process.

"Ten months ago, we were outside. Today we are in a warm building," he said. "This building will help manage the growing demands for services. So, tomorrow, people can be an example for someone else."

The Kennedys are that example.

What started off as a short-term home grew into a lifelong bond and adoption for many children.

"As a board, we were looking for someone special to name the building after," York Region CAS director Jane Weir said. "The Kennedys hit the top of the list. They have an incredibly open heart."

It's been a long standing joke in the area that the Kennedys wanted to start their own baseball team.

In fact, after 30 years, there is a Kennedy team. But as one of the Kennedy foster kids, Carla Pearson, put it, "it was pure insanity with that many kids".

After three loads of laundry a day and getting the kids buckled in the 12-seater van, Mrs. Kennedy said it was the small simple things, such as meals, that made them a family.

"Breakfast was wild. We served the kids their food first, then we ate after," she said.

"But the kids always wanted a family meal. So, on weekends, we squeezed everyone around the table and ate together."