

NEIGHBOURS OF

Oakridge & HUNT CLUB



Between
Heart
and Home
Talking
Community
With Erin Porter
in Oakridge

Opening Doors is Just Part of What Makes Erin Porter Special

BY APRIL WALL PHOTOS BY IMAGE DESIGN



Erin Porter says she is “...all in...” with her community on Queen Anne Circle in Oakridge, including contributing as one of the “Queens of Queen Anne” on their community Facebook page. She loves her neighbours and her neighbourhood and has nothing but good things to say. Erin has only lived in her home for 5 years, although she is actually a longtime Oakridge resident. “We just keep moving around Oakridge! We have lived on Whitton Avenue, Guildwood Boulevard, Normandy Gardens and Royal York Road! Five houses and all in Oakridge!” She laughs, adding that she loved decorating and renovating each and every one of them.

She purchased her current home to help facilitate a blended family, but when that didn't work out she had to get creative to keep her home, so she and her children would not have to move again. Both of Erin's children are now away attending university, and the large house had more space that she needed on her own. So, she came up with a creative plan to help herself. She designed and renovated her basement into a family-friendly 3 bedroom apartment to use as a short term rental to assist families in need of such a service. It has worked out perfectly.

To date, she has rented to buyers that have sold their home before their new home was ready, guests that came from out of town for special hospital treatments, executives relocating for work while they search for a permanent residence, or

providing women who were transitioning after a break up with a safe place for them and their children to stay, while they get their next-steps sorted out. “I've maintained all these contacts, which has in turn fostered new friendships.”

As a kindergarten teacher for 25 years with the Thames Valley District School Board, Erin has sometimes been called, “The Kindergarten Guru”. She worked for years mentoring students, parents and volunteers to help in school literacy programs, and designed a course to help children learn to read and write. After getting her special education training and working as a Special Education Learning Support Teacher, she observed a lot of autism in children. She met and spoke to a lot of parents waiting for support that was slow to come. This gap in the system inspired her to develop G.A.P., or Guided Autism Program, which she launched in January 2022. Using G.A.P., Erin coaches and guides parents waiting for home support for their children. Today there are over 50,000 families in Ontario waiting for autism support from healthcare and government programs. The pandemic only slowed these applications and the backlog is growing. Erin's customised 10-week programs can be delivered in their own homes to address crisis resolution and behaviour while they await funding and therapies. Her volunteer consultants in health, speech and funding offer valuable advice and contacts when needed.

Erin is just a few years away from retirement from the TVDSB and she has big plans to jump full time into her G.A.P. business as it grows. For parents in the autism community who are just looking for basic direction, she also offers free online workshops to answer questions and provide tips.

Although her son, Spencer Jeffreys, is in his third year at Dalhousie (and only comes home for the holidays), and her daughter Sydney Jeffreys is in her second year at Wilfrid Laurier University, Erin still continues with her seasonal traditions, such as her long-time love of tennis in the warmer months and skiing in

the winter (with the exception of some down time due to an anterior hip-replacement in spring of 2022).

As a Type-1 diabetic for 25 years, she wears "... an insulin pump and a continuous glucose monitor," all the time. She knows the importance of healthy living and keeping physically active. "Both my kids were ski instructors for 5 years in Collingwood on the weekends," she says, recalling the sometimes gruelling commute when they were younger to get them to work on time. "We braved a lot of snowstorms!" she laughs. The whole family are skiers. "I spent just about every weekend in the winter, since I was 10 years old, going to Devil's Glen to ski. I took my kids there every weekend, too." She is looking forward to returning to the slopes at Devil's Glen this winter.

In the summer Erin loves to play tennis, and frequently plays doubles with her sister, Jen Porter, as her partner. Since both sisters live in Oakridge, a spontaneous game on a breezy day is always doable. One of Erin's favourite things is being outside. Rain or shine, she would rather be outside than inside. Now with her new hip, Erin is back to her active lifestyle and couldn't be happier.

In the summer she and her family returned to Shamrock Lodge in the Muskokas, where they have been going for close to 2 decades. She describes it as "...a total 'Dirty Dancing' lodge," where the family has developed amazing relationships with other regulars. Erin's parents have also been joining the fun for a few days every summer for the past 16 years. Erin is part of the "Irish Lassies", a name that all the Shamrock moms have given themselves over the years. Now that their kids are grown, they plan an annual wine tasting trip to Niagara to keep the fun going.

For those that know her, Erin is a warm, genuine, talented, fun loving human with a big heart. She is looking forward to an amazing 2023 and would like to wish her Queen Anne Circle neighbours and friends a very Happy New Year! ■



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