

## YOUR STORY





# ONE HUNDRED BABIES

Sew on Fire Ministries founder receives local and national recognition

by Rose McCormick Brandon

**W**endy Hagar's passion is infectious. Her work would go on without awards, but receiving them is like a smile from heaven.

In May of this year, Wendy was named Citizen of the Year for Burlington, Ontario. Then, at a Canada Day ceremony on Burlington's lakefront, her MP presented her with the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal.

Wendy's organization, Sew on Fire, began at her dining room table 12 years ago with half a dozen sewing machines and a few volunteers. Since then, Sew on Fire has affected 200,000 people in 32 Canadian communities and 92 countries.

I visited Wendy at her newest location—a 6,000 square foot warehouse in Burlington—to discover how one person with a heart for the world's poor has turned a cottage-sized relief organization into an international ministry that supports hospitals, schools, churches and orphanages.

**Where did you get the idea for Sew on Fire?**

In 1999, I fasted and prayed for 40 days. As I prayed, the Lord let me see the world through His eyes. It was an amazing experience. Nothing spectacular happened when the fast ended, but I knew something would happen.

**Something did happen. What was it?**

In February 2000, Ron Garrison of Mission Partners International visited our church. He talked about the need in Russian orphanages. Offering time came. I was about to put my gift in the plate when God said to me, "I'm requiring more of you in missions." I wondered how that would affect my life. Would He send me to Ethiopia? Later in the day, I said to God, "What if I clothe 100 Russian babies? Would that be good?"

**Did you have any idea how you would clothe 100 babies?**

The idea came to me to sew tote bags and fill them with baby items. Within a two-week pe-

riod, \$2,000 was given to me for the work.

**Is that how your dining room became a mini factory?**

Yes, our dining room table became a sewing station. Volunteer sewers came to my house. Other sewers and knitters worked at home. People would say they were praying for a warehouse, but I told them the work was just for a season. As you can see (*she laughs and gestures to warehouse shelves*), the Lord had bigger plans than I did. God blessed my husband, Jeff, with a vision for the work too. And my children pitched in and helped.

**How is Sew on Fire funded, and what are your administration costs?**

No one receives a salary, not even me. Volunteers put in 800 to 1,300 hours monthly.

As the work grew, we needed more and more space. That meant paying for it. As I stewed over this, God kept telling me through sermons and Scripture that Sew on Fire was His work and He would supply the need. We're a registered charity. We have a few regular supporters, but mostly people give as the Lord lays the work on their hearts. I do a lot of speaking at community organizations and in churches, but I never ask for donations. I let God talk to people about that. I'm in partnership with Him. There are 2,300 verses in the Bible that talk about caring for orphans and widows, and they speak volumes.

**What kinds of projects do you take on, and how do you connect with overseas needs?**

We do bins for new immigrants and send supplies to First Nations reserves. We do a lot of work through other registered Canadian charities. I get hundreds of e-mails from around the world, but I can't ship just anywhere. All our gifts are hand-delivered. We give through someone who is working on a particular mission field. We also do first aid kits and teachers kits. One missionary couple contacted me and said, "We have an orphanage of 1,500 kids. Can you make up a backpack of supplies for each one?"

**Where do you get the supplies for these projects?**

God has given me boldness to call businesses and ask for donations. I go to stores, tell them the need, and leave with a trunk full of stuff. I pray before I ask: "Lord, bless them—whether they give me anything or not." Not many say no.

**How many projects do you take on each year?**

We do about 20,000 backpacks and layettes alone. Each one is valued at approximately \$125.

**It's a long way from your dining room table to Burlington's Citizen of the Year and the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal. How do you feel about these honours?**

It [Citizen of the Year] was nice for the promotion of the ministry, and I love the idea that lots of businesspeople were there who could donate supplies. I don't know if I deserve the award, but I appreciate it and share it with my volunteers. The presenter said, "This lady has more than exceeded all the criteria for receiving the award." That was humbling.

Then, the first week of June, my Member of Parliament called to tell me I'd be receiving one of the Jubilee medals on Canada Day. This award is a gift from God: it's for all the volunteers and supporters of Sew on Fire. It's God's way of encouraging me to keep working for Him. It makes me want to do more to please my Saviour.

**What does Sew on Fire need today?**

People to sew. They don't need to use our sewing room; they can sew at home. And I'd really like to connect with companies who have leftover T-shirts, hats and other promotional material. I would love to get a company's end of line or out of style clothing or shoes. I'd like to reroute them into the kingdom of God.

*For more information, visit Sew on Fire at [www.sewonfire.com](http://www.sewonfire.com) or contact Wendy Hagar at [whagar@cogeco.ca](mailto:whagar@cogeco.ca).*

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