

Coristine to replace Cowell in March

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Ron Coristine Jr. will take over the executive director's duties at Community Living Chatham-Kent on March 1. Lu Ann Cowell is retiring after 39 years with the organization.

On March 1, Ron Coristine will put his hand on the top rung of the ladder at Community Living Chatham-Kent, but it's his feet he's worried about.

"I will have some awfully big shoes to fill," Coristine said.

He is taking over as executive director from Lu Ann Cowell, who has been with the organization for nearly four decades.

Coristine is a relative rookie by comparison – with 24 years there.

"When I first started, I was green, right out of university. I thought I knew everything about everything, and I really knew nothing at all," he laughed. "Being hired here was a blessing. It has been a wonderful experience. People come and like it so much, particularly if you are given an opportunity to advance."

Coristine called Cowell his mentor.

"Lu Ann, she's been here over 39 years. She's been my immediate boss and mentor over the past nine years," he said. "She's so respected locally and provincially. What I've learned, I've learned from her. That can only be to my benefit."

According to a media release, Coristine's selection came after a detailed recruitment search and interview process. He said it was advertised extensively and believed there was a fair bit of competition for the position.

"We congratulate Ron on his accomplishments and look forward to the leadership commitment he will bring to Community Living Chatham-Kent in his new role as executive director," Stephen Andari, president of the board of directors, said in a media release.

Coristine started at Community Living C-K in February 1990. He is currently a program director overseeing the operations of Children's Respite, Adult Respite, Community Supports, JOBWORX – Employment Services, Making It Happen Program, Quality Assurance and Planning Department and several residential locations.

He said JOBWORX has really taken off. When he began, it was a fledgling project known as a supportive employment program. He said it is now one of the top programs in the province.

"The people in the program have gone out and done some great work over the years," he said. "We now support about 90 people in the municipality who have competitively paying jobs. It's just an outstanding program."

Coristine hopes to tweak Community Living C-K's offerings somewhat. He said it is a first-class agency in providing services and supports, but would like to build on that.

He's proud of the support offered by Community Living C-K, pointing to JOBWORX, the Parkfield Restaurant, residential and respite programs.

"We have great child and adult respite programs where people can bring their loved ones for a period of time. People can stay for a few hours or a few days," he said. "The people have a wonderful experience and the caregivers get some respite."

Coristine described the Parkfield as a "great relationship builder and a nice springboard for people to move into other roles."