



Paramedics Roman Nowickij and Nadine Bosscher with their new bikes.

Bike Medics take to road thanks to restaurateur

By Wilma Blokhuis
OAKVILLE BEAVER STAFF

When Eddie Tsang of ETCETERA, etc., restaurant in Bronte was asked to participate in a raffle to raise funds to provide mountain bikes for paramedics, he reached into his own pocket and donated four bicycles to launch Halton's Bike Medics team.

The donation, worth more than \$3,000, was made just in time for last weekend's Oakville Waterfront Festival, the Bike Medics' first assignment.

Tsang also donated racks and saddlebags to carry paramedic equipment such as portable defibrillators, oxygen and communications gear.

Tsang's donation is supported by Oakville Cycle & Sports, which assembled the bicycles, and will service them for two years at no charge, and Raleigh Canada, also of Oakville, provided the bicycles at cost.

The donation allowed Halton Region Health Department Paramedics to launch the Bike Medics ahead of schedule.

They will be on patrol, in pairs, at big events across Halton where access may be difficult because of large crowds, including the Oakville Jazz Festival, Midnight Madness, Summerfest, and next year's Burlington Sound of Music Festival.

"If we save one life over the next five years, it will be worth it," says Tsang. "I believe paramedics on bicycles is quite a unique idea, and with paramedics, every second counts."

Tsang decided to donate the four

bicycles when approached to make a contribution to a fundraising raffle to cover the cost of launching the Bike Medics program.

"The donation was a pleasant surprise," said Jim King, Director of Ambulance Services, Halton Region Health Department. "We went to see Eddie at ETCETERA, etc., looking for a meal, and next thing you know, he's giving us the bikes."

"It happened so fast we were scrambling to find enough paramedics who are trained on bicycles to patrol the Oakville Waterfront Festival," added King.

Eight paramedics have already been trained and five were on duty last weekend. More paramedics will be trained, he added.

"The bicycles will help provide areas that are not easily accessible by an ambulance vehicle with faster response times, such as special event venues," said King.

Ambulances will respond to calls attended by the Bike Medics as required, and individuals requiring hospital treatment will be transported via ambulance, added King.


Money raised by the raffle, initially intended to raise funds for the bicycles, will now be used to cover the cost of a trailer to transport the bikes, and to outfit the bikes with additional accessories.

The trailer was purchased at cost from Trailers by Jim Bray, another Oakville business. A number of businesses have already donated prizes for the raffle. The raffle will be held on June 29. To donate to the raffle, call the Halton Region Health Department, Ambulance Services Division at 905-825-6060 Ext. 7111.



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Viral meningitis still making rounds

By Angela Blackburn
OAKVILLE BEAVER STAFF

An outbreak of viral meningitis — not to be confused with the deadly meningococcal meningitis — is still making the rounds in north Oakville.

Local health officials remain on the alert as the number of confirmed cases of the illness has climbed from 15 to 37 over the last 10 days. The virus has also apparently spread from north Oakville to east Burlington. The Burlington cases include both elementary and secondary students, while the illness seems to be confined to high school students in north Oakville.

"The good news is that it's viral meningitis, not the bacterial type," said Mary Anne Carson, the manager of communicable disease and infection control for Halton's Health Department.

Major symptoms include a severe headache, stiff neck, drowsiness or confusion, nausea, vomiting and light sensitivity.

While these are similar symptoms to the often fatal bacterial meningitis, this illness is not life-threatening.

"Generally speaking people who have become ill have recovered within two or three days of receiving treatment from a physician," said Carson.

There is no specific treatment for the viral infection, but doctors can prescribe medication to reduce the symptoms of severe headache and nausea.

Halton usually averages about eight cases of this illness annually.

However, earlier this month 15 cases were confirmed in just one week and health officials put out an alert to the public — and local schools — a week ago.

Last week, that total climbed to 32 cases.

"It's still primarily in north Oakville and in high school students," said Carson.

However, at least three of the infected persons were elementary students.

Halton's health department sent a letter and information sheet home to parents, through both elementary and secondary schools.

Early in the outbreak, Dr. Bob Nosal, Halton's Medical Officer of Health, said he was convinced there are "scores of others who are also infected, who are not sick, but who could pass it on to others."

Incubation takes place within 3-5 days of infection and recovery is usually within 7-10 days, even without medical treatment.

Still, anyone experiencing symptoms is urged to check in with their family doctor.

Lab testing has confirmed the virus is of the enterovirus type. Nosal said that means that "scrupulous attention to hygiene" is the most important preventive factor.

"Hand-washing is very important and it's a very simple thing to do," he said.

The enterovirus can infect a person by respiratory-hand contact (coughing and then shaking hands) or fecal-oral contact (not washing hands after going to the washroom or changing a diaper).

Over the past five years, there have never been more than 8 to 12 cases reported annually.

To find out more about viral meningitis visit: www.region.halton.on.ca/health; www.cps.ca; www.hc-sc.gc.ca; and www.edc.gov; or, call the Halton Region Health department at 905-825-6060, ext. 7855.

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