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## Ontario launches new tree planting programme for Province's 150<sup>th</sup>

The Province of Ontario is launching "Ontario's Green Leaf Challenge" with the goal of planting millions of additional trees in 2017 to mark Ontario's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Wellington-Halton Hills MPP Ted Arnott, who has been working with the County of Wellington to push the Provincial Government to massively expand its tree planting efforts, is pleased with the news.

"I'm glad to hear that the Government is launching 'Ontario's Green Leaf Challenge' in response to our Private Member's Resolution," Mr. Arnott said. "While we would have liked to see a more ambitious tree planting target, this is welcome news."

Mr. Arnott praised the County of Wellington Council and staff for their leadership.

"It has been a pleasure working alongside the County on this," Mr. Arnott said. "The County has been a real leader when it comes to municipal tree planting. Since they launched the Green Legacy Programme in 2004, it has grown into the largest municipal tree planting programme in North America and has even been recognized by the United Nations for its success."

"The County of Wellington is proud to have created the largest municipal tree planting programme in North America," said Warden Dennis Lever. "The Green Legacy Programme has planted over 2 million trees with the help of community partners since the programme's inception in 2004. We are pleased to hear

that the Government of Ontario has pledged to partner with families, community partners and businesses to plant 6 million trees province-wide in 2017. This initiative, along with the 163,000 trees the County of Wellington will be planting this year, will help promote cleaner air and help fight climate change."

In June 2015, working with the County of Wellington, Mr. Arnott initiated the idea of an Ontario Green Legacy Programme, calling on the Provincial Government to massively expand Ontario's tree planting efforts beginning in 2017 to celebrate Ontario's 150th anniversary as a Province within Canada.

Mr. Arnott then followed up with a Private Member's Resolution in the Ontario Legislature calling on the Provincial Government to establish an Ontario Green Legacy Programme, in effect taking the County of Wellington's Green Legacy Programme province-wide. The resolution was passed unanimously with support from MPPs from all parties on October 22, 2015.

Since 2015, Mr. Arnott has continued to persistently pressure the Government to follow through on the resolution. He repeatedly followed up with successive Ministers of Natural Resources, both writing and speaking to them, as well as raising the issue many times in speeches in the Legislature. He also arranged a meeting in his office in April 2016, with officials from the County of Wellington and senior Ministry of Natural Resources staff, includ-

ing the Deputy Minister.

On March 29, Natural Resources Minister Kathryn McGarry approached Mr. Arnott in the Legislature to personally give him a letter announcing the launch of Ontario's Green Leaf Challenge. She also gave him a White Pine seedling, suitable for planting.

The following day, in response to a question about Ontario's Green Leaf Challenge in Question Period, the Minister acknowledged the efforts of Mr. Arnott and the County of Wellington.

"I'd like to thank Forests Ontario for being a champion of this cause and the member from Wellington-Halton Hills for his continued efforts to support his residents to get involved in local tree-planting efforts through the County of Wellington's Green Legacy Programme," the Minister said in the Legislature.

Like the County of Wellington's Green Legacy Programme, Ontario's Green Leaf Challenge depends on the help of volunteers and Mr. Arnott, who serves as the Ontario PC Critic to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, hopes people get involved.

"The Government now needs to promote this. If everyone in Ontario were to plant just one tree, we could exceed the Ministry's targets by 10 million trees," Mr. Arnott pointed out. "By planting more trees, we can all do our part to help confront the challenge represented by climate change, while at the same time help make our province a better place both now and for future generations."

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 Luke 19: v29-44  
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