

'Defining a Sense of Community'

The United Way is talking to the people

BY DONNA DANIELLI

It was an oddly disparate group of people bound together by a single mandate, 'Defining a Sense of Community'. The first of three planned neighbourhood meetings held by the Milton United Way took place in Campbellville on September 7 and drew participants from as far away as Georgetown and Acton. The ensemble gathered for the meeting included young mothers, a high school student, community activists, executives from non-profit organizations and more. They came from different backgrounds, with different viewpoints, yet all spoke with a united voice, saying, "A community includes all of its residents and must be safe and accessible to all."

"How do we define community?" asked Peter Appleton, who, along with Ann Wilcox, acted as facilitator for the evening. Each participant shared what they liked most about the community, and then expanded that vision to relate how they see the community looking in ten to twenty years. Concerns expressed covered a wide range, from economic viability and sustainability of Campbellville businesses to accessibility of social programs. The longer the discussion went, the more questions seemed to arise: Does it cost more to shop locally? Is the recent increase in vandalism, drug use and violence a direct result of lack of programs and opportunities for today's youth? Is the transportation system in place sufficient to ensure access to programs, and how does lack of transportation affect those in the rural areas? Can Campbellville's reputation for small town character and individuality be maintained in the face of new growth? What about tax rates, well water safety, programs for young children, lack of affordable housing and much, much more?

"Have we lost that sense of community?" asked Ann Wilcox. "If so, how do we take back the community?" That simple question of "what do we do next?" opened the floodgates for the participants. Suggestions came so quickly, the facilitators barely had time to copy them down. Pointing to the successes of the Nassagaweya Community Consultation Committee's Annual Road Clean Up, and the popular Halloween Children's party in Campbellville every year, both of which are staffed completely by volunteer community residents, it became apparent that these volunteers are the key to a healthy community. It was however pointed out that residents be made aware that there are smaller volunteer opportunities available in every community, that no one should turn away from the thought of volunteering because they don't have the time to commit to larger projects. Other suggestions included the creation of multi-generational community events that offered something for everyone, as well as the provision of transportation to these events to allow for accessibility. As well, a fostering of shared responsibility, coupled with mutual respect and civility was stressed as an essential element. It was noted that local teens need to be considered as community members and that assumptions that five or more teens gathered in a public place are somehow up to no good, need to be challenged. Those who feel discriminated against, whether they be teens, disabled, senior citizens, or parents of the very young, will feel disassociated from a community that ideally should offer a place for everyone. The meeting participants were unanimous in the resolution that residents of all ages needed to be encouraged to take ownership in the issues and become part of the solution.

Funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation, the Community Matters neighbourhood discussions hosted by the United Way of Milton are part of a larger project taken on by 17 separate United Way Organizations across Ontario. "We're working together towards a deeper understanding of the issues," explained UW's Community Investment Associate Susan Lynch. "We want to insure that our activities have a real and lasting impact on the community." The United Way will be sharing their findings with their Board of Directors, as well as their member agencies, the Town of Milton and the Region of Halton. An additional two Community Matters are planned for Milton, on September 20 at Hugh Foster Way and again on September 21 at the Milton Sports Centre. Everyone is welcome to attend either of these meetings, both of which start at 7 pm. "One of the focuses is to insure that everyone has a voice," explained Ann Wilcox. Peter Appleton was quick to concur with this, stressing the importance of resident input in the Community Matters project. "Often some of the smaller voices, the smaller communities, get lost," he said. "Having different venues, while similar issues may come up, a cross pollination of issues will also come up."

For more information about the United Way or the Community Matters project and meetings, please contact Susan Lynch at 905-875-2550.

Fourth probable human case of West Nile virus

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protect themselves against mosquito bites and WNV by taking the following steps:

- Avoid areas with high mosquito populations.
- Wear light-coloured, loose fitting, tightly-woven clothing, including long sleeves, pants, socks, shoes, and a hat, to cover exposed skin when outdoors from early evening to morning, or any time when in wooded areas.
- Use a mosquito repellent approved by Health Canada's Pest Management Regulatory Agency.
- Make sure all windows and doors in your home have screens that are in good condition.
- Take extra precautions from dusk to dawn when mosquito activity is particularly high.



Also, to reduce mosquito-breeding areas around your home:

- Drain any areas of standing water on your property.
- Remove old tires.
- Turn over pails, toys, and wheelbarrows that may collect water.
- Change the water in birdbaths weekly.
- Keep your eaves troughs clear to avoid trapped water.

Maps showing the locations of WNV activity, as well as any areas where standing water sites or catch basins have been larvicided, are available on the Health Department's website at www.region.halton.on.ca/health.

To report a dead bird or standing water, or for more information about WNV, please call Halton Region at 905-825-6000, toll free 1-866-4HALTON (1-866-442-5866), TTY 905-827-9833.


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