

Volunteers are the key

By DONNA DANIELLI

As a key contributor to a wide variety of Halton's community agencies, the Region has developed a roundtable process to network with community leaders to discuss the challenges facing those agencies.

The focus of the discussion is revolving around volunteers and the issues faced not only by those who give their time freely, but also of the agencies that are reporting an increasing reliance on these volunteers.

One of the first meetings, held in Milton, drew a dozen people, representing a variety of non profit agencies, eager to voice their thoughts and concerns. Each participant was quick to point out the fulfillment they receive from volunteering; knowing that a few moments of their time can make a huge difference to someone in need.

It was also generally acknowledged that volunteers are key players in the creation of a stronger, healthier and safer community. Interestingly enough, for many of the participants, there had never been a conscious seeking out of a volunteer opportunity, they just happened to see a need and stepped in to fill it without giving it much thought. For others though, there is also a sense of "If I don't do it, who will?"

Much thought was given to what requirements are necessary to attracting and keeping volunteers. Volunteer opportunities must be flexible, both in task and time, with the job matched to the skill sets of the volunteer. Key components are orientation and training, as is support and appreciation.

Unfortunately, there are many challenges that may stand in the way of someone wishing to volunteer, and those issues were addressed to an extent by the round table. Many people feel they have less time to volunteer in this busy stressed out society characterized by commutes and long work hours just to make ends meet.

A lack of transit and accessibility to volunteer opportunities may be holding others

back. What was clearly stated by the group though was that many people want to overcome these and other obstacles if possible, as people truly do want to live, work and volunteer within their own communities.

A great deal of the discussion focused on funding difficulties for non-profit community agencies. Many of the participants felt that whenever their group wanted to do something, there was always a cost associated that had to be carefully balanced with their limited budget. As well, grant applications seemed to be a source of dismay for many of the participants. "It's all forms and deadlines, you never see a person," said one volunteer. There was a general consensus around the table that there needs to be a fluid, fair and transparent application process for organizations.

The underlying theme for the morning though was the need to find a way around the difficulties, to not simply give up in the face of adversity. Society needs to pull together to ensure that all its residents receive the support, services and care that they need.

More community dialogues on volunteerism are planned by the Region. They are scheduled for Saturday November 26 at the Central Library in Burlington from 9:30 to 11:00 a.m., on Monday November 28 at Tansley Woods in Burlington from 7 to 8:30 p.m. on Tuesday November 29 at the Georgetown Parent/Child Centre in Georgetown from 7 to 8:30 p.m., on Wednesday November 30 at Halton Region from 9:30 to 11:00 a.m. and on Thursday December 1 at the Halton Region Museum from 9:30 to 11:00 a.m. Anyone interested in attending one of the round table discussions is encouraged to call 905-825-6000, ext. 7901 or 1-866-442-5866, ext. 7901.

All of the data collected from the round table discussions will be contained in a report and recommendations to be released at a Community Forum in the spring of 2006.

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Festival of Trees at Milton Mall

Sale of Christmas trees by Kinsmen



PHOTO BY PETER MCCUSKER
Decorated trees à la carte from the Milton Kinsmen at Milton Mall. The draw takes place Dec. 3 at 5pm for the 13 trees with proceeds going to the Milton District Hospital Fund. Kinsman Dwight Ward will sell you a ticket for \$5, three for \$5, or \$10 for \$10.

It's the 9th year for the Festival of Trees, an eye-catching fund-raiser organized by the Milton District Kinsmen Club that will see twelve decorated Christmas trees and one wreath raffled off on December 3.

Organized by Kinsmen member Doug Hall with the assistance of volunteers, the club began selling tickets on November 11 and will continue to sell the up to the draw date with proceeds going to the Milton District Hospital Foundation.

Sponsors have donated the trees already decorated or ready-for-adornment by Helen Furik and her team of volunteers. The decorated trees - ranging in size from three to eight feet tall, are on display near the Bulk Barn at the Milton Mall. This year's theme tree is everything Toronto Maple Leaf complete with a set of tickets to a March game, hats, mittens and other items carrying the hockey team's logo.

Tickets are one for \$2, three for \$5 or ten for \$10 and are available at the Kinsmen's booth at the mall during regular store hours.


Milton District Kinsmen Club would like to thank the Milton Mall and the Bulk Barn for their support along with the following sponsors: Ron Furik, Regional Councillor, Ward 3, Mattamy Homes, Milton Hospital Local CUPE 815, Halton Land Registry Staff, Aim, Lock and Safe, Gildea Family, Milton Public Library CUPE Local 4366, Lions Automotive, Chasers, Ned Devine's, Agents of ReMax, I Do Weddings and Bell'Occhio, RPM's Accounting Services.



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