

# Interfaith youth festival called groundbreaking event by its organizers

The region's first-ever Halton Interfaith Youth Festival – which will take place tomorrow at St. Volodymyr Cultural Centre – is being touted as a groundbreaking event by all those involved.

During the day, which is being hosted by the Interfaith Council of Halton from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., high school students from a variety of religious backgrounds will meet, learn about and celebrate the diversity of the area's faith communities and the common bonds that unite them.

More than 300 students and teachers, religious and political leaders and Halton Regional Police officers will take part with a common purpose – to create better communication, awareness and trust among all members of the community.

"We anticipate that this unique learning opportunity will be instrumental in providing the venue for open and honest discussion about the facts and myths surrounding various faith groups in our community," said A.Q. Mufti of the Islamic faith community.

Rabbi Paul Sidlofsky of Oakville's Shaarei-Beth El Congregation characterized the day as "historic" and said it will provide a unique opportunity to mix and mingle in a "friendly, informal, non-judgmental environment."

"They will be able to see each other as representatives of various faith groups, but also simply as human beings, regular high school students like themselves," he said.

This event has been developed through the efforts of many faith groups in Halton and with the cooperation of the Halton Independent High Schools and both Halton school boards.

"This initiative could not have been possible without the support received from the four municipalities, the Region of Halton, the Halton Regional Police Service, its board and many generous sponsors," added Mr. Mufti.

Rabbi Sidlofsky also expressed his gratitude to all those who helped organize the festival, including Halton Regional Police Insp. Jackie Gordon.

"Their kindness and dedication to community relations have been inspirational and have built greatly on the foundation of caring, communication and trust that the Interfaith Council and police have already laid," he said.

"We should feel proud and very privileged to live in such an exceptional community."

The day will begin at 9:30 a.m. with "icebreakers" and registration followed at 10 a.m. with introductions and welcoming remarks by youth representatives of the Interfaith Council. The plenary speaker, Michael "Pinball" Clemons, is at 10:15 a.m.

At 10:40 a.m. a film will be shown in which youths speak out about what's "cool or exciting" about their religion or faith.

At 10:50 a.m., attendees move on to the many booths available for them to experience.

During lunch, choirs, hand bell choirs and dancers will entertain the crowd.

From 1 to 1:15 p.m., it will be prayer time for the Islamic faith so participants will be invited to respectfully observe, pending consent by the individuals who will be praying.

Closing remarks will conclude the day.

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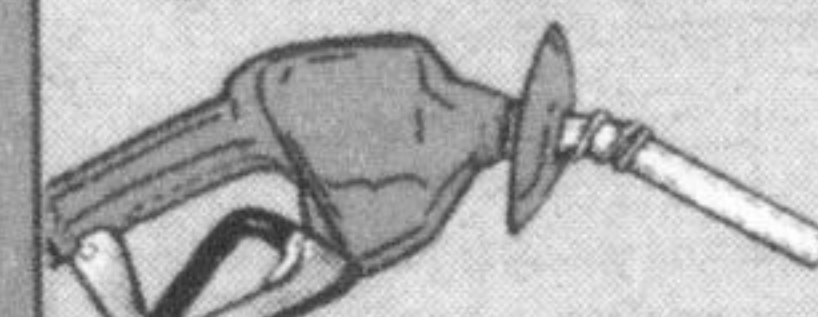


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