



Brianne Thompson, right, stands with 12-year-old Derrick in front of a railroad crossing display in Essex. Thompson started the Operation Bumblebee initiative that will soon include signs being erected in Essex. She said the project was created to ensure safety for individuals with disabilities. Pictured below is the warning painted on the sidewalk.



Operation Bumblebee takes to the streets

BY DANIEL SCHWAB

One day last year when Brianne Thompson was driving home in Essex she witnessed a man with a disability standing dangerously close to a moving train.

The driver of the car in front of Thompson's got out and pulled the man back from the tracks.

"It's just bothered me because I saw someone standing so close to a passing train," said Thompson, 22. "It also bothered me to see someone having to pull them back instead of them having a way to know where to stand. There has to be a better way."

The event influenced Thompson to start Operation Bumblebee.

Since February, the fourth-year University of Windsor student has been working on the community safety initiative. The idea was to notify citizens about where to safely stand while waiting at a railroad crossing.

She contacted CN Rail,

which informed her that the safest place for a person to wait for a train was not at the edge of the sidewalk, but 25 feet away.

"And so I went into town one Saturday with a big billboard of (the design) I wanted and placed it on the ground and measured it with tape measure," she said. "I got quite a few people looking at me like I was crazy through Essex," she laughed.

But Thompson was determined to put her plan into action. It included painting two sets of footprints on the sidewalk included with the words, "Wait while train is crossing."

She photographed the display and made a presentation to the Essex accessibility committee.

"I showed how the end of the sidewalk, where typically you'd think it'd be safe to stand, is only five feet away from the tracks, which is 20 feet too close," Thompson explained.

The accessibility committee supported the plan and with their backing,

Thompson made a similar presentation to Essex Town Council last April.

"It was a wonderful idea and I'm sure it was 100 per cent agreed upon," Essex Mayor Ron McDermott recalled of council's reaction to the plan.

McDermott said council discussed what to do in the winter when sidewalks are sometimes covered in snow, which would make the painted instructions difficult to read. A suggestion for accompanying signs to be erected near the tracks was soon included in the plan.

An initiative was approved to establish the displays at railroad crossings on Talbot, Medora and Maidstone Streets.

The town's director of public works, Richard Beausoleil, said the size of the signs will be about 12 by 8 inches and will most likely go up within the next two to three weeks.

Thompson's goal is to make Operation Bumblebee a countywide project.

In October, she presented

her plans to the Essex County accessibility committee and a month later she went to Tecumseh town council, which also approved the initiative.

The initial plan, Thompson explained, was to help individuals with disabilities.

"A lot of individuals with disabilities are very literal," she said. "It was also meant for people who have a visual impairment. But anybody can benefit from it, really."

The payoff for her is that individuals with disabilities "will be safe in town and be able to walk with pride."

"We have several individuals with disabilities in Essex," she said. "I do feel it's the caregiver and the community's responsibility to help them achieve independence and safety."

Thompson has worked with individuals with disabilities through Family Respite Services in Windsor. Part of the inspiration behind Operation Bumblebee comes from working as a respite provider, she said.

More people voting since last election

BY FREE PRESS STAFF

Voter turnout in the Town of Essex has increased by 1,422 since the last civic election in 2003.

The electorate has grown by 351 voters in that time.

About 48 percent of eligible voters cast ballots Nov. 13, up from 40 percent three years ago.

The biggest increase

came in Ward 2, with 1,658 ballots cast accounting for 49 percent of the ward's electorate – up from 33 percent in 2003.

Wards 3 and 4 were both up 8 percent this year, while Ward 1 increased by about 2 percent.

The most voters turned out in Ward 1, with 2,846 people casting a ballot. The lowest was in Ward 3, where 1,773 people voted.

Two-car collision ends in alleged assault

BY FREE PRESS STAFF

A LaSalle woman will be appearing in court next month after the Essex Police Service responded to a two-car collision near Holy Name School in Essex Nov. 15.

The accident occurred on Fairview Avenue and involved two women – one driver from Essex and another from LaSalle,

police said.

According to a police report, one of the cars was rear-ended when hit by a following vehicle. After the collision, one of the drivers exited her vehicle and confronted the other driver, police said.

The second driver suffered swelling and bruising to her face after repeatedly being punched by the other driver, police allege.

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