

Mayors unite on mental health initiative

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Staff Reporter

A local effort is behind a national initiative encouraging all Canadian mayors to promote mental health. Markham Mayor Don Cousens said he was approached by the American Psychiatric Association and asked to take a leadership role in marshalling forces across the country to educate and support mental health within every community. About 30 mayors from municipalities across

Canada, including every provincial capital except Winnipeg, are on-side, including Richmond Hill Mayor Bill Bell and Stouffville Mayor Wayne Emmerson.

Recent evidence of a dramatic rise in psychiatric diseases world-wide is a profound concern to communities and to the country as a whole, Cousens said.

"Mayors have an obligation and opportunity to raise public awareness of the economic and social stakes we have in the mental health and resilience of working Canadians in times of economic, social and personal dislocation and uncertainty," Cousens said.

The mayors are working in conjunction with the Canadian Business and Economic Roundtable on mental health, which on Oct. 8 will meet in Markham to examine depression, stress and its impact in the workplace.

The roundtable, formed in 1997, is a group of business, medical, education and research leaders dedicated to making sure mental illness is looked upon as a business and economic issue and to promote mental health as an asset to productivity of the community.

Former Minister of Finance Michael Wilson has been named honorary chair of the roundtable after his outspoken support of the rights of those who suffer depression and other mental illnesses. His son, who suffered from depression for many years, committed suicide.

"During the summer, the Homewood



DON COUSENS



WAYNE EMMERSON

Centre for Organizational Health at Guelph will examine the link between business, information and mental health and report back in the fall. Homewood is working as a partner in the roundtable and the mayors' initiatives.

At the Oct. 8 meeting, Cousens hopes to make a real splash. He will be encouraging other York Region mayors to participate; he hopes to get local mental health experts involved as well as local business.

"It's Markham's way to do something so spectacular in the sense it will be inclusive, it will go well beyond Markham, across the country," he said.

Cousens added a proclamation of intent to be signed by all participating municipalities will encourage cities and towns to hold at least one local event a year bringing business and health professionals together to promote mental health in the workplace, at home and at school.

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