

Youth 'definitely engaged' in politics, former page says

BY LISA QUEEN
Staff Writer

When 15-year-old Mark Frisoli is sworn in March 20, he will become Canada's first high school student to serve as a municipal councillor.

Sure, the Grade 10 student at Vaughan's Father Bressani Catholic High School student won't be able to vote on council issues, will be excluded from closed meetings and will be paid in co-op credits, but he's excited about his new job.

"It's a great honour to be the first. I'm really going to set the precedent and set the way," he said.

"I know the spotlight will be on myself to make sure this will be a success. It's just great to have a voice."

A teenager excited about politics?

Popular opinion says young people don't care about government, a growing and disturbing global trend.

In the past, young people have become more engaged in the political process as they matured and took on families, mortgages and other adult burdens and responsibilities.

But a study for Elections Canada shows that's no longer the case.

Recent studies indicate that this explanation no longer holds," the report says. "Not only are young people participating less than their elders, their willingness to participate appears to be declining over time."

And yet, Mark is just one of a significant number of York Region youths captivated by politics.

For example, Newmarket's Brett Kenworthy and Aurora's Liana Turin are launching a Liberal youth

group in the federal Newmarket-Aurora riding.

"We are seeking youths between the age of 14 to 25 who want to have fun and contribute to a better Canada by helping form a young Liberals club in our riding," their call to action said.

"All our futures depend on the youth of today effectively taking the helm of our great country."

Mr. Kenworthy, a 23-year-old former page at the Ontario legislature and House of Commons, believes youth are interested in politics but have a difficult time tapping into the system.

"It's tough for them to find places where they can go to be involved in politics," he said.

"If it was easier to find a place to be involved in politics and activities, I think youth are definitely engaged."

Newmarket high school students Jen Seredetchnaia, 15, and Mike Lynn, 16, are developing their political prowess by monitoring Prime Minister Stephen Harper's new government.

"He can propel us into being a more important international country," Jen said during a discussion about politics last month.

Both she and Mike worked on Newmarket-Aurora Conservative candidate Lois Brown's unsuccessful campaign.

Meanwhile, Richmond Hill's Andrew Brander is a 20-year-old university student who is the president of the youth association in the provincial riding of Oak Ridges, vice-president of the Richmond Hill Conservative riding association and fundraising director of the Ontario PC youth association, an organization he soon hopes to serve as presi-

dent.

The third year public relations and media studies student admitted he didn't have lofty political ambitions when he bought his first Conservative membership card at 14.

"I needed community service hours to graduate high school," he laughed.

But while he has thrown himself heart and soul into politics since those early days, he understands why broken political promises have left other youths disillusioned.

"People just don't trust politicians, it's as simple as that. I know (former Ontario premier) Mike Harris wasn't entirely unpopular with a lot of people but he was a politician who made promises and delivered," he said.

"The difference between a good politician and a bad politician is someone who has his convictions and sticks with it."

Both he and Mark are convinced youth will get involved in politics if they are listened to and have leaders of integrity to follow.

"I wasn't alive in (former prime minister Pierre) Trudeau's days but I've heard a lot about him. He was someone who spoke his mind," Mark said.

"I'm not a huge Trudeau fan but he was somebody who spoke his mind for the country."

While he was initially attracted to federal and provincial politics as a child, he said municipal politics is the level where young people can influence change in their communities.

In addition to engaging

Vaughan's youth in local politics, Mark wants to bring problems affecting his peers — gangs, drugs and bullying — to councillors' attention.

"There's a lot of youth who want to do something but they don't know how," he said.

"I know it sounds cliched to say but I got involved to make a difference."

For more information about the Newmarket-Aurora young Liberals club, call Liana at 905-841-0137 or e-mail at llurin@yahoo.com

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