

# You can support troops at CNE

BY JOE PANTAUZZI  
Staff Writer

If you're planning to take in the Canadian National Exhibition, you will also have a chance to support Canadian troops overseas.

The Armed Forces have launched a campaign to remind Canadians about the role soldiers from across the country play.

A giant yellow ribbon can be signed at the Armed Forces booth, inside the Princess Gates, beginning today.

Markham Mayor Don Cousens, who was chosen to be the first GTA mayor to sign the ribbon, served as a military officer and Commandant of the Fort Henry Guard, Kingston.

While Mr. Cousens is happy to lend his name to the initiative, the mayor

stressed his involvement should not be viewed as endorsing any federal war policy.

"This is not a political statement in support of the Government of Canada's policies with respect to any region of the world where the Canadian military may be deployed," Mr. Cousens said in a statement.

Ward 2 Councillor Phil Bannon will sign the giant yellow ribbon will also sign the Yellow Ribbon today at 2 p.m.

"I encourage as many people from Whitchurch-Stouffville as possible to visit the Canadian Forces booth at the CNE to learn about the Canadian forces and the many duties they perform for us and to sign the Yellow Ribbon to signify our support for the troops."

# Series offers new hope

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is renewed, she said.

The divorced 34-year-old Keswick woman is the mother of three children between the ages of two and 16.

She is also the founder of Project Donate, which collects and distributes quality household items and clothing to those in need in northern York Region.

"The greatest benefit of the series is the fact people are willing to come together," she said.

"I love to help others. With the awareness and response the articles created, I'm now able to do that.

"Reaction has been overwhelming. We've received help for our Christmas drive and we've already helped several families coming out of shelters."

Since the series launched, Ms Piehl said she has received more than 120 phone calls with offers to help her and Project Donate.

One woman, who wished to remain anonymous, arrived in Ms Piehl's subsidized housing community and bought ice cream for each child.

Her 16-year old daughter was treated to a back-to-school clothing shopping spree. Upon hearing Ms Piehl has ambitions to attend night school toward a civil law degree, several lawyers offered help with placements.

"It's wonderful," she said. "A lot of people just called with kudos for telling my story."

The series also forged a new partnership between Ms Piehl and Jenna Vass, a 27-year-old working mom with four daughters under 10.

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The Richmond Hill palliative care worker revealed how her family is endeavouring to recover from a string of recent tragedies, including the murder of her children's father and an uninsured house fire.

*People who read the statistics never believed there was so much poverty.*

As a result of the series, Ms Vass has founded Project Donate South, serving the marginalized in her surrounding community.

"I'm amazed by the response," she said. "It's changed my perception and made a major difference in my outlook. I used to cry every day. The sadness of what happened will never change. But now there's tears of joy, too."

Reader and public generosity with offers of clothing and furniture prompted the young woman to establish the affiliate.

"We're paying it forward," she said.

In addition to donated legal

counsel on her late partner's pension benefits, food, a freezer and an upcoming fundraiser with the Richmond Hill Wal-Mart, Ms Vass says the outpouring of help impacted her children most. Her three oldest kids were treated to their first week-long overnight summer camp by one reader.

"They have a renewed sense of people's goodness," she said. "Considering that not long ago, they were the ones who gave to the less fortunate, they now appreciate what it's like to receive as well as give."

"Maybe the best of all was from a person who just called to say that the children's father was his hero," she said of Randy Jones, gunned down while helping a senior citizen who was accosted by thugs.

James Ong's hope of a new life in Canada has been restored, he said. Newly arrived from the Philippines, he spoke of the trauma of leaving his family to find work as a professional manager. A recruiter read the article and has offered to help.

MaryAnn Steffler may have new mobility as a result of the series. The 51-year-old Markham resident, first diagnosed with MS in her mid-30s, has received news she may be eligible for a new motorized wheelchair.

"I might get a replacement power chair through the MS Society," she said. "That's huge."

"People who read the statistics never believed there was so much poverty. Now, more people are mindful that not everyone has the same amount of money. It's made a real impact."



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