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WALKING THE MULTICULTURAL PATH

Scouting's appeal is universal, South Lake Simcoe area commissioner Donna Hazlett said, noting, "I like the fact we welcome everyone and we accommodate people's differences." York Region has nearly 3,000 beavers, wolf cubs, scouts, venturers and rovers.

Going co-ed, embracing change part of York scouts' effort to remain relevant

BY CHRIS TRABER
Staff Writer

One world. One Promise. Insofar as organizational mantras go, Scouts Canada has one of the best. Mainly because the membership endeavours to live up to it. Fresh from 100th anniversary celebrations earlier this month, Scouts Canada is a brand synonymous with preparedness, community service, duty and honour. Add fun, learning and adventure.

Of the 102,000 Canadian scouting youth and adult volunteer members, 2,951 reside in York Region, where the cultural and gender diversity of the evolving scout movement is proudly evident.

York Headwaters area commissioner Philip Tsang is head scout for southern York Region.

A network consultant by profession he joined as a nine-year old student in his native Hong Kong. After arriving in York, he joined the 1st Unionville group, along with his seven-year-old son.

Scouting, he said, is as global as it is progressive. With 25 million members in 216 countries and territories, the movement embraces change.

Gone for decades is the stereotypical image of uniformed troops segregated by gender.

Today, the levels and programs are co-ed, formal uniforms exist, but T-shirts are the fashion. Traditional skills and activities are offered for ages five to 26, along with environmental responsibility programs.

In fact, a climate change crest has



JASMINE and JUSTIN CHAN: Markham siblings enjoy activities offered in beaver, cub groups.

been developed to encourage youth to study greenhouse gas-reducing activities, including an age-appropriate home energy audit.

Scouting in York dates back eight decades, South Lake Simcoe area commissioner Donna Hazlett said. As the scout head for the northern part of the region, Ms Hazlett has been involved since 1988, when her son joined beavers.

"Scouting's appeal is universal, she said.

"I like the fact we welcome everyone and we accommodate people's differences," she said.

Mr. Tsang, a Markham resident, agrees.

"We're a culturally diverse community and almost 50 per cent of our (York Headwaters) scouts are Chinese," he

said. "We are starting Buddhist, Jewish, Tamil and Greek groups."

Scouting is a family affair for the Gambles of Aurora.

"Including our family and my brothers and sisters, we've been involved for more than 40 years," said Robert Gamble, a longtime cub, beaver and scout leader and now a venturers advisor.

A member since he was a youth, Mr. Gamble is convinced scouting is one of the best activities available for children.

"I can't think of anything that offers the variety," he said. "Sports are a one shot activity. With scouting there's a multitude of activities involving the community, fundraising and the environment."

"Scouting also teaches leadership and camping skills and respect for nature."

His son, Kenton, 13, started as a beaver at age seven.

The Dr. G. W. Williams Secondary School student said he enjoys the diverse appeal.

"Friends, responsibility and independence is a big part," Kenton said. "I like the different places we visit and the activities that are organized. This weekend we're at an extreme survival camp in Algonquin Park."

Ditto for Markham brother and sister Justin and Jasmine Chan, six and nine respectively.

"My favourites are crafts and games," said Justin, a 3rd Unionville beaver. "I like making toys and animals with paper."

Jasmine, a cub in the same

group, is in her fifth year as a scout member.

"I really like the challenge," she said. "I like all the activities. Sometimes we have to build things we can't do by ourselves, so we ask for help. That builds teamwork."

Mom Crystal Chan, whose husband, Eugene, is a scout leader, believes scouting is a character builder.

"They get so excited about their Wednesday night meetings," she said. "They never miss them. It's good training. Beavers offers good social life and it's amazing for Jasmine. We go on family camp trips and she does all the work, from cooking and starting the fire. Her aunts and uncles are so impressed."

Share your scouting memories at www.yorkregionnews.com/scouting.html

Membership has declined 10 per cent since last year, Mr Tsang said.

"Parents and kids are busy people," Ms Chan noted. "They have full schedules and work and school loads. Getting volunteers is also an issue."

"There's a lot of competition for time, like soccer, baseball and hockey," Mr. Tsang said.

For more information, contact Mr. Tsang, 416-712-8713, Ms Hazlett, 905-898-4556 or check out www.scouts.ca

THE FAST FACTS

► Happy birthday:

• Scouts Canada celebrated the 100th anniversary of scouting last month with a jamboree north of Montreal.

• Scouting was started in England in 1907 by Lord Baden-Powell. Since then it has spread to 216 countries and has more than 28 million members, including 78,000 Canadian scouts and 24,000 adult volunteers.

► The Canadian story:

• Scouting came here in 1908. Since 1914, every governor general has been the chief scout for Canada.

• Scouting became co-ed in 1993.

► Scouting in York Region:

• York is divided into north and south around Bloomington Road.

• The south has 1,423 youth and 453 volunteers in 28 groups, including residents of Participation House, a home for challenged adults.

• The oldest group is the 2nd Markham troop, established in 1957, while the largest is 3rd Unionville with 171 members.

• Northern York has 825 members and 250 volunteers. The oldest group is in Mt. Albert, which celebrated its 80th birthday last year.

• Iconic author and historian; the late Pierre Berton, helped the 2nd Kleinburg Group acquire an old train station for its meeting hall in the 1980s.

► Core programs:

• Beavers, aged 5 to 7, focus on fun and co-operative learning;

• Wolf cubs, ages 8 to 10, focus on working toward individual and group goals;

• Scouts, ages 11 to 13 prepare for adulthood through personal development, teamwork and leadership skills;

• Venturers, ages 14 to 17, encourages personal development and achievement through increased responsibility and;

• Rovers, ages 18 to 26; challenge young adults to be active in their communities and develop social issue awareness and spiritual development.

► Famous local scouts:

Former Markham mayor Don Cousens and his successor, Frank Scarpitti, Regional Councillor Tony Wong, York Regional Police Chief Armand La Barge, former Richmond Hill mayor Bill Bell.