

Hope blooms when communities work together to help those in need

Environment dictates our well-being: author

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Wouldn't it be wondrous if there was a machine that could make us healthier, happier, safer and enhance our well-being, mused keynote speaker Ric Young at the launch of the Making Ends Meet in York Region project at Markham Theatre Tuesday.

Waiting a few poised beats, the author of *Getting To Maybe* answered his own question.

"We already have it," the founder of E-Y-E / The Social Projects Studio, said. "It's called community."

Addressing the blue ribbon audience, comprising members of the region's human services planning board, social service administrators, politicians and anti-poverty advocates, Mr. Young illuminated the host board's mission in timely fashion.

Appropriately, his message, delivered on the first day of summer, spoke of how hope blooms when communities work collaboratively to help those in financial need.

A social marketing pioneer, Mr. Young endorsed the region-approved, year-old board's mandate to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of human services in York Region through collaborative advocacy. Drawing on peer Robert Putnam, an influential American academic and author of

Bowling Alone, he discussed the importance of social capital.

Closely related to what many call civic virtue, social capital refers to connections among individuals, social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them.

'It's not the problems that define York Region. Rather, it's your response to the challenge.'

In other words, communities in which everyone's welfare, particularly those at risk, is a priority are healthier places to live.

"Our environment dictates our well-being," he said. "Children and youth born in cities with high social capital do much better. Where there's low social capital, there's higher crime rates. In communities where people are socially disconnected, they're at a two to five time higher risk of dying than those who have supports."

With more than half the world's population living in high density cities, it's imperative cities "become the innovative engine of the 21st century."

He posed the enigmatic question: "Can the city be a genius?"

Citing examples of how global communities rallied resources and adjusted collective attitude, his answer was yes.

Devastated by a 2007 tornado, the impoverished 777 people of Greensburg, Kansas, committed to rebuilding and making their city the greenest in the United States. Today, like-minded municipal administrators consult Greensburg for advice.

The relevance to York Region is strong, Mr. Young said.

"You're taking on significant problems together," he said. "You're people who care deeply and work together meaningfully. You're building bridges, not silos. You're harnessing the energy and assets of the community for positive purposes. That's the red thread that connects York Region to places like Bogota and Harlem."

"It's not the problems that define York Region. Rather, it's your response to the challenge. To have hope, you must be champions of hope."

The event struck a chord with attendees.

"It's exciting to see a group of leaders looking at issues that are important to individuals and innovative ways to make change happen," York Region Community Foundation executive Director Gina Rosen said.

York Region District School Board education director Ken Thurston deemed the planning board a great, collaborative ini-

tiative.

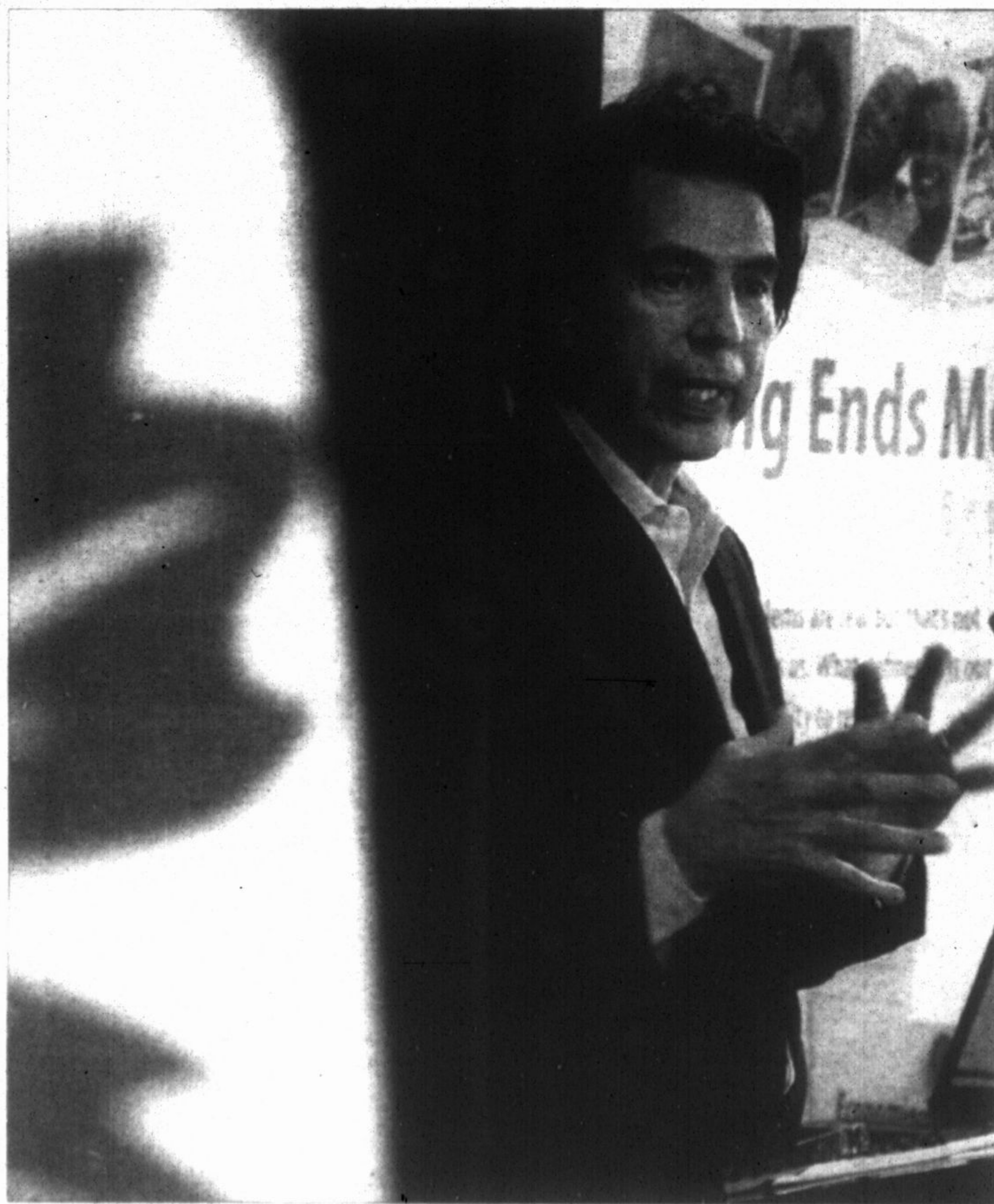
Non-profit Transit Georgina executive director Cathy Wilkinson was buoyed by the board's mission.

"We help the people the board is looking to support," she said. "It's a wonderful step forward. I found it interesting we heard about hope and collaboration. That's very positive."

'Turning the curve is like moving a huge boulder. We need a lot of people pushing together. We'll be successful if our communities and agencies work together. That's the power of many.'

Planning board co-chairperson and Newmarket Regional Councillor John Taylor facilitated a panel discussion that included board member social service agency administrators.

"There's still much to be done," he said. "Turning the curve is like moving a huge boulder. We need a lot of people pushing together. We'll be successful if our communities and agencies work together. That's the power of many."



STAFF PHOTO/STEVE SOMERVILLE

Author Ric Young speaks at the launch of Making Ends Meet in York Region Tuesday.



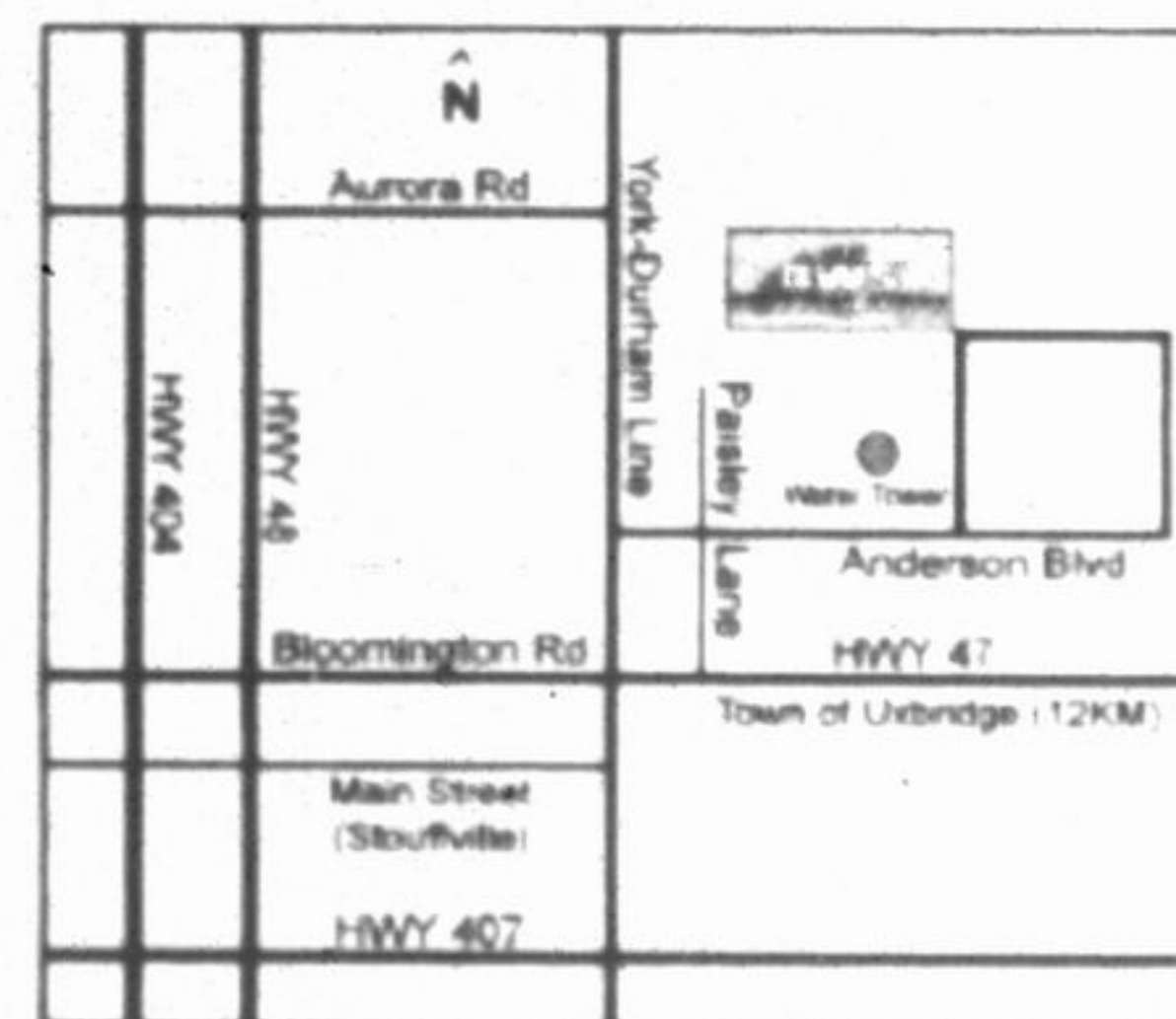
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