

Sun-Tribune

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The Sun-Tribune welcomes your letters. All submissions must be less than 400 words and must include a daytime telephone number, name and address. The Sun-Tribune reserves the right to publish or not publish and to edit for clarity and space.

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EDITORIAL

Officer protected us right up to his death

The spotlight shining on police officers in this province hasn't always been a positive one in the past year.

Officers patrolling the G20 event in Toronto came under public scrutiny for abusive tactics. Their conduct has been described as high-handed, criminal and callous. Several lawsuits have been filed against the Toronto Police Service Board and individual officers.

In another instance, a judge has found Peel police officers conducted an unlawful strip search, then tried to cover it up, which led to the acquittal of a drunk driving suspect.

But the actions of York Regional Police Const. Garrett Styles are more representative of the men and woman who work to keep us safe every day.

Const. Styles was killed early Tuesday after being crushed by a minivan he pulled over.

Reports indicate the minivan's under-aged driver accelerated, dragging the officer

about 300 metres before the vehicle rolled over on him.

Yet, even as he lay pinned under the vehicle, struggling to breathe, Const. Styles was concerned with the safety of the occupants of the vehicle that was crushing him.

Right to the end, he was protecting the public.

That's the image that should come to mind when we think of our police officers.

Every day, they put our safety before their own and, sadly, it takes a tragedy such as this to remind us of that.

We are blessed to live in one of the safest communities in the country and our police officers deserve credit for that.

Const. Styles, who leaves behind a wife and two children younger than three, made the ultimate sacrifice to keep us safe. We must respect that sacrifice, along with his courage.

There's nothing routine about a police officer's job.



Band-Aid remedies won't cure our region's social ills

To tell us how York Region can be a place where every one of us thrives, John Taylor took us to a remote First Nations community.

Speaking at the United Way of York Region's annual general meeting at the Aurora Cultural Centre Tuesday, the co-chairperson of the region's human services planning board recalled an incident that brings tears to his eyes decades later.

For a young teacher from Newmarket arriving in a native community whose children were plagued by substance abuse, fetal alcohol syndrome, alcoholism and sexual abuse, "it was a shocking experience". One day, he saw one of his students, a 14-year-old girl, staggering along the street, clearly drunk. She was accompanied by two men, one of whom was her uncle, who he knew had abused her previously.

He wanted to intervene, to help the girl, but was unsure what to do. He made a desperate call to the police and the girl spent the night in jail. A potential tragedy was averted — for one night.

"It was a terrible, bad moment," he confesses from the podium, his voice breaking with emotion in memory of his feeling of helplessness and futility.



Debora Kelly

He knew well what he did that night was simply a temporary expedient — "a Band-Aid" — but clearly the memory of it compels him to this day to strive to affect real, lasting change.

"We've got to do more here than just apply a Band-Aid," he appeals.

The Newmarket regional councillor is spreading the message about Making Ends Meet, a new report highlighting the increasing economic vulnerability across the region for low and moderate-income families, with annual incomes of up to \$70,000.

More than one-third of families and individuals, even those who are educated and working, are struggling with the high cost of living in our communities, particularly in the

southern part of our region.

More of us are at risk, with our population aging and 23,000 newcomers, many of them immigrants, arriving annually.

"I don't think we are even beginning to grasp what lies ahead of us," Mr Taylor said.

Making Ends Meet sets as its ultimate goal affordable housing — with the average cost of a new home here at \$566,000, it's hardly affordable — and economic self-sufficiency for all residents.

Lofty goals, to be sure, but with the help of all of us, it's achievable. Otherwise, it's more Band-Aids. Making Ends Meet is about moving from talk to action; from Band-Aid solutions to change that will make our community great for every single one of us.

While no one organization can do this, our United Way is already leading the charge, particularly with a program funding grassroots initiatives addressing urgent needs.

United Way gave a record \$5.3 million last year to local programs and services, with even more going this year to those informal networks of caring that help kids be all they can be, move people from poverty to possibility and build strong, healthy neighbourhoods.

But you, too — "the genius of community" — are needed to help "turn the curve", Mr. Taylor said.

More than one-third of families and individuals, even those who are educated and working, are struggling with the high cost of living in our communities ...

So, what can you do to help families make ends meet? How can you help people forced to choose between paying rent or putting food on the table? How can you help families who can't afford the cost of sports programs for their children?

How about starting a clothing exchange in your neighbourhood? Or organizing free after-school programs? Or setting up a community garden?

Want to learn more or share your idea? E-mail hspb@york.ca or call 905-830-4444, ext. 2112. And please don't forget to donate to the United Way of York Region.