

STAFF PHOTOS/MIKE BARRETT

York Regional Police Insp. Russell Bellman makes sure he has his red shoelaces well tied for the launch of an awareness campaign to promote the 2013 Special Olympics Ontario Games at the Regional Municipality of York headquarters in Newmarket Thursday.

Supporters paint region red for Special Olympics

BY JOHN CUDMORE
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Forget the town, they intend to paint the entire region red.

That announcement came Thursday afternoon with the launch of an awareness campaign to promote the 2013 Special Olympics Ontario Games at the Regional Municipality of York headquarters in Newmarket.

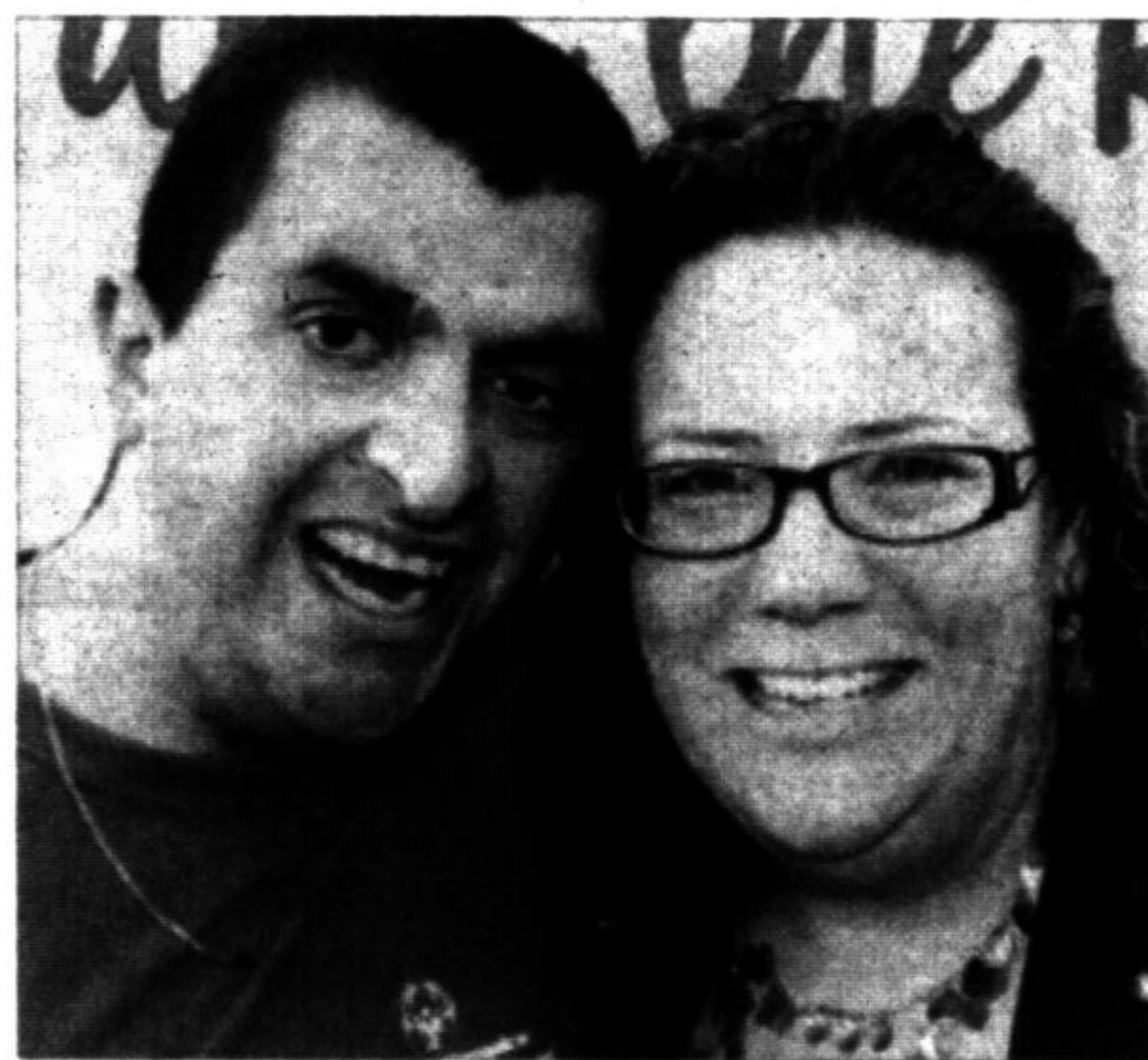
A celebratory Paint the Region Red Day marked the beginning of a two-month lead-up to the July 11 to 14 multi-sport competition, which will attract more than 1,000 athletes, coaches and support staff from across Ontario to York Region venues in the spirit of competition and friendship.

"Special Olympics is an amazing organization," said York Regional Police games manager Karen Richards, who, since August, has overseen preparations for the five-sport event, which will touch down in all nine regional municipalities.

"It's a chance to see people with intellectual disabilities express themselves through sport and, at the same time, a chance to get involved with them. It gives people with special needs a chance to really shine."

All of the nearly 800 athletes have qualified for the four-day games through regional competition. Top performers in July advance to the national Special Olympic Games in Vancouver.

"Our goal is to create a legacy for more people to become involved in Special Olympics," Ms Richards said, pointing to a fundraising goal of \$1 million, which, in part, would help create post-games programs to promote and raise participation levels across the region.



Special Olympian and podium speaker Matt Nighswander of Stouffville with 2013 Special Olympics games manager Karen Richards.

There are just 39 athletes from York Region in the games and organizers would like to more, she added.

The games were last held in York Region in 2000, but mostly based in Newmarket. For those games, the late Rob Plunkett served as manager. Ms Richards oversaw accommodations for athletes, officials and support staff.

ON THE COVER: Hanah Catalano, 12, a student at St. Mark School in Stouffville carries the Special Olympics torch, accompanied by EA Margaret Grandison, through an honour guard of York police officers at Special Olympics Day in Unionville Thursday.

"It's a great way for our communities to be involved," said the Newmarket resident, who went on to work for Special Olympics Ontario for four years as manager of volunteer services.

"It's important for the whole region to be involved. These are the biggest provincial games in Canada for the Special Olympics program."

With a wish list for 500 volunteers, Ms Richards, who has also volunteered at national Games in Calgary and London, seeks to fill positions.

Also unveiled was the Adopt An Athlete program, which allows you to sponsor a games participant and help offset operating costs. For \$500, patrons are assigned an athlete and provided with his or her biography and schedule and a chance to meet and cheer for the athlete.

So far, 87 athletes have been adopted by York Regional Police and the Region of York and organizers hope all 767 will be adopted, Ms Richards said.

Special Olympics Ontario is a non-profit organization dedicated to empowering individuals with intellectual disabilities to become physically fit through year-round training and competition in 18 core sports.

Venues to be used include Our Lady of the Lake Catholic College School in Keswick for rhythmic gymnastics to Bill Crothers Secondary School in Unionville for track and field events and St. Andrew's College in Aurora for soccer. Softball will be contested at Richmond Hill's Richvale Community Centre and Rolling Hills Golf Club in Gormley will host golf.

Opening and closing ceremonies will be at Ray Twinney Complex in Newmarket.

Visit specialolympics2013games.com for more information on volunteering.

Whitchurch-Stouffville News Digest

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Tremors felt on Main St.

Tremors reported yesterday morning throughout York Region were the result of aftershocks from a 5.1 magnitude earthquake originating 21 kilometres north-east of Shawville, Que. at 9:43 a.m. Natural Resources Canada seismologist Janet Drysdale said.

Residents reported varying degrees of seismic activity on Main Street, Stouffville and in Keswick, Aurora and Richmond Hill moments later.

Ms Drysdale, based in Ottawa, Ont., felt the tremors, which were recorded as far away as Waterloo. Shock waves radiate concentrically from the earthquake epicentre at 8.2 kilometres per second she said.

The tremors experienced in York Region registered at a magnitude of 4.1, a mild to semi-moderate event, she said.

Earthquakes registering five or more can cause significant damage. Ontario has never experienced such a magnitude, but many have been recorded immediately outside the province's borders, Ms Drysdale said.

Motus O tackles Match Girl

Motus O will stage their production of The Little Match Girl at Flato Markham Theatre for the Performing Arts May 30.

The Stouffville-based dance troupe's adaptation was inspired by the Hans Christian Andersen short story, as well as Markham's An-Lun Huang's backstory and musical score.

A father and daughter are forbidden by government guards to present their puppet version of The Little Match Girl. The father lands in jail, the daughter destitute. But she finds solace in her dreams of dancing snowflakes and life-sized puppets.

The show starts at 7 p.m. For tickets, 905-305-7469 or go to www.markhamtheatre.ca

Walk a lifesaver

About \$6,000 was raised by participants of the inaugural Stouffville Save the Mothers Walk last Saturday.

Every 90 seconds a woman dies due to pregnancy complications. Most of those deaths occur in Third World countries. Save The Mothers, a Canadian group, works to reduce the death rate.

For more information, go to www.savethemothers.org