

United Way launches 'scary as heck' goal for 2013-2014



By Jeff Doner

Hundreds of amped up and enthusiastic participants and spectators were out for the Toromont CAT Dragon Boat Festival for the United Way York Region at Seneca College King Campus last Saturday.

An impressive 28 teams representing different municipalities, community groups, sponsors and businesses dug deep and frantically paddled their way to the finish line to help raise \$120,000 in support of United Way in the community.

But it's just the start of a much larger campaign that has many excited about the challenge, as United Way York Region CEO Daniele Zanotti enthusiastically announced a three-year campaign goal to raise \$30 million in three years.

'Historic, bold, ambitious, never been done before and scary as heck goal, but so necessary in our growing region,' Zanotti said to a raucous crowd before the races. 'We have an unprecedented opportunity to change lives in our neighbourhoods, not only for this year, but for decades to come.'

'Imagine a network of care and support in every neighbourhood? Vaughan or King, Whitchurch-Stouffville, Georgina, East Gwillimbury, Markham, Newmarket, Richmond Hill or Aurora. In three years we will know we have succeeded when people and families in municipalities across this region can say, 'there is help in my neighbourhood.''

According to the United Way, last year they helped 28,557 children and youth with educational and recreational supports, after school programs, leadership counseling and more. These programs assisted 12,523 people find jobs, access housing, and secure food and helped 40,014 people access essential services in their own neighbourhood.

On hand for the event was the Aurora Avengers team that was eyeing a repeat win of the municipal cup, but their Yonge street rivals from Newmarket edged them in the race to take the title.

Mara Gromacki has been captain of the Avengers team for three years running and said there was definitely some pressure to repeat as municipal cup winners in the friendly race.

'I think we did great, wish we could have walked away with the trophy for the second year running, but we still have two more races,' she said. 'It's kind of like proud mama moment. We won last year, so there was kind of a lot of pressure to win this year too, but I'm so proud of the team and all of the work we've done so far.'

Gromacki also said the event is great for bonding the region together for a great cause.

?It goes a long way. We had a lot of response even from just patrons at the facilities who saw the posters asking to come out and cheer, it has been a lot of fun.?

The Aurora team will begin their corporate fundraising campaign in the fall to help the United Way reach it's goal.

Although the day's events were about having fun and raising awareness, Zanotti reiterated the dire need for services and help within York Region.

?The demand for social services is outgrowing the supply,? he said. ?What makes a neighbourhood great,? more than roads, sewers and stores are places where people can go get involved and find the help they need. We know that communities with formal and informal support have better health, higher educational achievement, better economical growth and lower crimes rates. We know that with friends like you, we can make our great neighbourhoods in this region even greater for all.?