

View From Queen's Park: Special Olympics, Hospital Funding, and my Family BBQ

By Chris Ballard, MPP

Newmarket-Aurora

I had the honour of hosting Premier Kathleen Wynne in our riding of Newmarket-Aurora this past week, and it included a stop in Newmarket where the Premier announced Ontario is helping people lead healthier lives.

Premier Wynne and I met with Special Olympics Ontario to announce the Ontario government is investing \$7.2 million to promote active lifestyles through the Ontario Sport and Recreation Communities Fund.

As part of this investment, the province is providing more than \$224,000 to Special Olympics Ontario for the Partners in Play program. This project will introduce young, special needs athletes to sports such as track and field, basketball, soccer and swimming. Waiting for the media conference to begin, I had a chance to talk with a number of special needs athletes from the riding. As usual, they are an upbeat and dedicated group, focused on being the best athletes they can be.

Members demonstrated their swimming abilities and talked about the positive aspects of being in the Special Olympics program. I was amazed at the diversity of talent and dedication. Not only do they participate in swimming, many are involved in multiple sports, like bowling and track. One gentleman, looking in excellent shape, has been swimming in the program for 39 years. Here in Aurora, we are blessed with an active Special Olympics group. The group's website lists sports including swimming, basketball, bocce, golf, softball and rhythmic gymnastics.

Volunteers, of course, are at the heart of the organization, and I was delighted to meet many parents and coaches before the announcement.

To learn more about volunteer opportunities with Special Olympics in Aurora, contact the group's Volunteer Coordinator by e-mail: aurora.volunteer.coordinator@specialolympicsontario.ca. For general information about Special Olympics in Aurora, contact the Community Coordinator either by e-mail: aurora.coordinator@specialolympicsontario.ca, or leave a message at 905-726-3825.

But back to the reason the Premier was in our riding. The Ontario Sport and Recreation Communities Fund will support 123 provincial, regional and local projects in 2015-16. These projects will increase opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to get active.

Visiting the Aurora Special Olympic website, I was reminded of the Special Olympic oath: "Let me win, but if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt." That's an inspiring oath, and one we should all repeat, no matter what our circumstances.

In other important local news, Ontario is renewing hospital infrastructure in Newmarket-Aurora to ensure patients get the care they need.

Through the Health Infrastructure Renewal Fund (HIRF), the province is investing \$91,874 for critical infrastructure upgrades at Southlake Regional Health Centre, including roof replacements and new windows; upgraded heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems; upgrading back-up generators; and upgrading fire alarm systems and other work needed to address requirements under the Ontario Building Code and Ontario Fire Code.

In the 2015 Budget, the government committed to providing more than \$11 billion in hospital capital grants over ten years, including grants administered through the HIRF. This funding is part of the largest infrastructure investment in Ontario's history - more than \$130 billion over 10 years. This investment is helping connect regions, develop new economic opportunities and improve quality of life for Ontarians by supporting infrastructure projects in cities, towns, and rural and remote communities across the province.

Upgrading health-care infrastructure is part of the government's economic plan for Ontario. The four-part plan is building Ontario up by investing in people's talents and skills, making it the largest investment in public infrastructure in Ontario's history, creating a dynamic, innovative environment where business thrives, and building a secure retirement savings plan.

I'm proud to see that the Ontario Government is investing in our community through The Health Infrastructure Renewal Fund. This funding allows Southlake Regional Health Centre to address its important infrastructure needs while providing the patients of Newmarket-Aurora and the surrounding area with better access to quality care.

Dr. Eric Hoskins, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care said "These projects make a real, positive difference in the healing environment, complementing the high-quality care patients receive in Ontario hospitals."

Dave Williams, President and CEO of Southlake added "The funds will assist the hospital in maintaining a state-of-the-art facility for the thousands of patients we are proud to serve each year."

In 2014-15, the Ontario government increased the Health Infrastructure Renewal Fund to \$125 million – more than doubling its investment from \$56.2 million the year before. It has maintained the fund at \$125 million in 2015-16.

And finally – join me this Sunday, August 30, for a free family barbeque at Riverwalk Commons, 200 Doug Duncan Drive, Newmarket, from 1 to 3 p.m.

Besides giving me the opportunity to meet you, you'll have the opportunity to meet a variety of organizations from the area that help our youth get their lives back on track. It's our way of thanking them for their work – and introducing them to you. Enjoy some free food and entertainment. See you there, rain or shine!

I invite you to contact me on any issue. Please call my community office at 905-750-0019, or visit my website at www.ChrisBallardMPP.ca. I look forward to hearing from you.