

Accessible washroom trailer has regal debut



By Brock Weir

Prince Harry might not have needed to stop and try a new throne on for size, but York Region's new accessible washroom trailer had a regal debut on Friday morning, taking pride of place at the Invictus Games' archery championship.

A grassroots initiative which has seen significant financial support from the Federal Government along with the fundraising efforts from Whitchurch-Stouffville Mayor Justin Altmann's very public wedding last year, along with financial contributions from the Region of York and communities like Aurora, it is a facility that is a long-time coming from those facing mobility challenges within our area.

Built to comply with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, the fully accessible washroom trailer features adjustable ramps, push-button access, automated lifts for those otherwise unable to leave their wheelchairs, and expansive areas for caregivers to change individuals and administer food and medication.

For Aurora activist Tyler Barker, the accessible washroom trailer is integral for people with mobility challenges, regardless of age, to experience the same level of dignity as everyone else in the community.

"This will definitely benefit people in wheelchairs, and even people with the Able Network and Kerry's Place," says Mr. Barker of the organizations working with people living with intellectual challenges and autism respectively. "I know they like to come out to events and be as active as possible, but even with individuals in wheelchairs or those who have mobility issues with walkers have to use an accessible washroom with a lift to transport people with higher needs or even a little heavier.

"I hope this will be a big boost across York Region and also for people who need to go inside for privacy issues, whether it is to take their medication or, for people with behavioural issues or just get anxious, to be able to go inside, have a drink of water in private and not be out in the open.

"It may be a lot of work, but now people with disabilities can have dignity."

Going forward, the accessible washroom trailer will be maintained by the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville, which handle bookings for fairs and other community events across York Region. Along with the bookings, Whitchurch-Stouffville will also handle the towing and setup arrangements, with the associated costs picked up by the organizing municipality, so people with disabilities can have a safe, secure and dignified way to use the bathroom and, in turn, have peace of mind in advance of the event.

A driving force behind the trailer is Derek Bunn who teaches special needs students at Sutton District High School. Co-founder of last month's Student Hoedown, which saw over 1,000 special needs students from across York Region descend on Aurora for a morning and afternoon of music and fun, he was at Toronto's Fort York for the washroom's debut, fielding questions from disabled service personnel and curious bystanders along the way.

"Where else would you want it?" said Mr. Bunn of its debut at the Invictus Games. "This is a world event right now and the world needs to see that people with disabilities belong in the community and there is not a better place to have it. People have been asking questions, wanting to know what it is all about, and how you get in touch with Innovative Trailer Designs to make a few.

"It has been a dream and I think it is a great day for people living with severe physical disability. It gives them a chance to get out in

the community now and have this at every fair and event in York Region. I think our goal is to possibly approach every municipality to have one of these in their community and, with the support of large corporations like Tim Hortons or the LCBO, it would be nice to have these all across the Province.

?It is taking that next step of integrating people into our community ? physically disabled people and even seniors. Now they can be involved in the community and enjoy life.?