

Coldest Night of the Year will help raise funds, awareness for unhoused, services



Residents of our communities are preparing to dress in their warmest garments and hit the streets this month for the Coldest Night of the Year, an annual event designed to raise funds for and awareness of local programs that give a helping hand to the unhoused.

While Coldest Night of the Year (CNOY) events have always had a tremendous buy-in from participants, with the affordability crisis continuing unabated, the importance of initiatives like these cannot be understated.

Locally, this year's walks will take place on February 24 and include events in Newmarket hosted by Inn from the Cold and by Blue Door Shelter in Richmond Hill.

"For many, winter might be layering up, skiing, shovelling snow or running inside to escape the bitter cold," says Michael Braithwaite, CEO of Blue Door. "For far too many, winter means trying to find shelter from the freezing cold on an empty stomach, without warm enough clothing to face the elements."

"At Blue Door, we are working hard so that everyone has a safe place to call home, even if it is just for one night. Our Coldest Night of the Year event on February 24 is a chance for our community to come together, to raise funds and walk in solidarity to support Blue Door's various programs and initiatives moving forward. This year our goal is to raise \$150,000 and we can't do it without your support."

The Richmond Hill event begins at 4 p.m. at Toronto Montessori School's Lower Campus.

Inn from the Cold's CNOY event will take place at Newmarket's Riverwalk Commons, with gates opening at 4.30 p.m. for a 5 p.m. start. This year, they've set a fundraising goal of \$90,000.

"This is our biggest fundraiser of the year," says Wayne Ford, Chair of the Inn from the Cold Board. "What's interesting about it is who participates. It's really family and friends, but we've got volunteers and staff, and we even have our clients who come in to support the walk every year. It really is a community event."

Now in its twelfth year, Ford says what makes CNOY endure are the volunteers.

"This week is when team captains really start to push their teams for donations," he says. "Last week we were around 65 per cent

(towards our goal) wondering if we were going to make our goal. This week, we topped over 86 per cent ? we have 277 walkers, 58 teams, and I think that speaks to the community support.?

That support, he adds, has only been bolstered by the affordability crisis and how top-of-mind housing has been in the last few years.

Fundraising numbers and, of course, participation, has ?really gone up? over the last three years, Ford notes.

?Homelessness has grown and?we provide a place for the homeless to go so they are not out wandering the streets,? he says, adding that funds raised by Inn from the Cold this year will go primarily towards food and shelter supports. ?Because we provide that service, you don't see as many homeless people in the Newmarket-Aurora area. If we are not providing that service, you would see a much more visible homeless community in the area. Even though we do provide these services, there are still a number of tent communities that operate in this area. It's a much bigger problem, but it's not as visible because we're providing this service to the housing community.?

For more information on Inn from the Cold's Coldest Night of the Year event in Newmarket, including how to participate or support an individual or team, visit cnoy.org/location/newmarket. Further information on the Richmond Hill event hosted by Blue Door can be found at cnoy.org/location/richmondhill.

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