

First Responders to be honoured with rock concert



Nicole Taylor is organizing a large scale event to honour local first responders on First Responders Day on June 1.

By Brock Weir

When Nicole Taylor first got herself settled on a yoga mat, she felt as if the weight of the world had been lifted off her shoulders.

That was a difficult time for Ms. Taylor, the wife of a military firefighter. It was shortly after 9/11, her husband was being deployed on HMCS Calgary bound for the Middle East, and she had recently suffered a miscarriage very late in the pregnancy. This discovery came just at the right time.

As a military wife and an OR nurse at Southlake Regional Health Centre, she says she quickly realised the benefits yoga would have to both people in the military and first responders, and she set out to share it with the people in her world.

Nicole founded Taylor Made Yoga, which specializes in yoga not just for people in her line of work, but also first responders. This year, however, she wants to do a bit more for first responders and have a rockin' time in the process.

Inspired by Newmarket-Aurora MPP Frank Klees' re-introduced bill to designate June 1 as First Responders Day in Ontario, Ms. Taylor, her friends, colleagues, and clients have banded together for a mini-marathon and fundraising concert in Newmarket to raise funds for first responders and research for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

"I always knew I wanted to connect yoga and the military together and then I started researching yoga for PTSD," she says, noting she was one of the first yoga teachers in Canada to specialize in the subject. "I started classes and soon after that I had many OPP coming to my classes, soldiers from CFB Borden (where her husband has worked steadily since 2007) and also veterans, and it has just been spiralling by word of mouth."

An anesthesiologist at Southlake later suggested that it would be great to have the first Canadian research study looking at first responders, PTSD and yoga, and with contacts at York University they have endeavored to do just that.

"I said to her one day, 'wouldn't it be nice if down the road somebody could do research, even if it is similar research, not to go through the hoops that we did?'" she recalls. "We thought we would do a 5k to raise money for cancer research, for post-traumatic stress and first responders. Then an ex-police officer I work with said it would be cool to have a rock concert afterwards as something really different."

"I thought it would be cool, but I know nothing about the rock world [but] a nurse here is always talking about Glass Tiger. [She was acquainted] with Sam Reid and got me hooked up with him in 24 hours!"

From then on, organizers have formed a committee to put together a great tribute to first responders throughout the two regions, and helping to steer the event are first responders from Barrie right down through to the southern end of York Region.

"It is just amazing the first responders that have banded together," says Ms. Taylor. "It is like this army that is merging."

The events will take place at Newmarket's Ray Twinney Complex as a sort of centre point for all the people they hope to attract with the 5k and 10k happening earlier in the day, capped by Glass Tiger and a wide variety of entertainment, including a blues band formed by women in the York Regional Police.

Support has also come in from the Yellow Ribbon Campaign, and Southlake itself.

"Dave Williams, the CEO of Southlake, has been a huge supporter of mine," she says, noting she first became acquainted with him when another staff member encouraged her to approach him about her yoga program.

"He said this wasn't foreign to him because with NASA they often use yoga to decompress after missions. He offered to help, so the Foundation came on with the run. A couple of weeks ago, we still needed more help raising funds for a lot of things happening that day and since Frank inspired us with this rock concert and run [we thought] we would go to him and he basically said, "How can I help?"

Further details, including times, locations, and ways to contribute to the June 1 event can be found at their new website, www.irunandrock.ca.

"First responders from all walks of life are going to be involved not only with the run, but in the performances," said Mr. Klees. "There are going to be bands that are going to be playing that are fire fighters, York Regional Police, there is a blues band that has police women, and I think for people to be able to see first responders outside of their uniforms and see that they're real people and can actually connect with them is going to be very important."