

FRANKLY SPEAKING: Act Inspires

First Responders Day Act Inspires

By Frank Klees, MPP

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Mark June 1 on your calendar and plan everything else you may be doing around an event that you and your family won't want to miss. Why? Because if you believe as I do, that First Responders deserve to be honoured, recognized and supported for their service to our community, then you will want to be part of this inaugural event:

iRUN & ROCK UNITED BY TRAUMA

I am often asked to name the highlights in my 18 years as a Member of Provincial Parliament. I welcome those opportunities, because they remind me how blessed I am to have had the privilege of making a difference in people's lives through service in public office. I want to share my most recent experience I hope will prove as inspirational to you as it was to me.

You may recall that I proposed a Private Member's Bill in the last session of Parliament to proclaim May 1st of each year as First Responders Day.

The purpose of that Bill was to raise awareness of the daily sacrifices these men and women and their families make, to ensure that our communities, our province and our country is the safest place in the world to live and to raise a family.

Who are First Responders in our community?

As I pulled into my driveway this past Saturday evening, I was drawn to flashing lights down the street.

A York Central Fire Services vehicle and a York Region EMS Ambulance were parked in front of a neighbour's home. A heart attack? Did they get there in time? I was returning from the memorial service for veteran NDP MPP Peter Kormos, and throughout the drive I had been planning this column. But there they were now on MY street...sent by experienced EMS dispatchers, firefighters and paramedics responding to a life-saving call that would soon make its way to the emergency room where highly skilled doctors and nurses would take over.

One of thousands of calls like it, answered every day throughout our province.

"Police officers, firefighters, paramedics, medevac pilots, dispatchers, doctors and nurses, emergency managers, those who serve in our military and the many volunteers who dedicate countless hours to emergency response through organizations such as St. John's Ambulance deserve to be recognized for their selfless service to our communities.?"

This, in part, was my appeal during debate on the First Responders Day Act. It was one of those rare occasions in the legislature when a bill receives unanimous approval. Unfortunately, the legislature was prorogued and the bill was never enacted, but the seed was sown and here's the rest of the story.

Given the status of the provincial First Responders Act, I wrote to all Ontario Mayors asking that they Proclaim their own First Responders Day. I was encouraged that among the many who responded positively was the Town of Aurora and the City of Oshawa whose mayors also attended the iRunandRock media promotion event. Also in attendance was Councillor Jane Twinney from Newmarket.

Go to the iRun & Rock website at www.irunandrock.ca and you'll see what can happen when dedicated people embrace a worthwhile cause and run with it.

A few weeks ago, I sensed that one of my scheduled constituency meetings would be a bit out of the ordinary. The list of attendees was eclectic to say the least: Nicole Taylor, Emergency Operating Room Nurse and Yoga Instructor, Wayne Dufour, Police Officer, Sam Reid of the famed Glass Tiger rock band. What I heard from them was inspiring and I had a sense that these people were about to impact the lives of untold people and I would do whatever I could to support their efforts.

Inspired by the First Responders Day Act

Nicole Taylor shared her passion for raising awareness of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) among First Responders, and her collaboration with Dr. Lisa Hutchinson on the need for research into PTSD as it affects First Responders. She pointed to her experiences as an emergency operating room nurse and military wife as a basis for her motivation to advance this cause.

Nicole told me that she was inspired by my First Responders Day Act and shared the event that they had conceived that would do just that, and here it is:

The event will consist of a 1/5/10 km run, and a Full Battle Rattle Team event. Registration begins at 9am, the Run starts at 11am and the Full Rattle Battle Team Event starts at 1pm.

Free Concert Admission thanks to title sponsor Pace Credit Union.

This event is completely organized by volunteers and all proceeds net of costs will be dedicated to PTSD research in emergency services under the oversight of the Southlake Foundation. I encourage you to participate and to spread the word.

The First Responders of our community deserve your support and encouragement.

More details can be found on my website at www.frankklees.com or directly at www.irundandrock.ca I look forward to seeing you on June 1st.