

FRANKLY SPEAKING: Essay Contest

First Responders Day celebrations include student essay contest

By Frank Klees, MPP

Newmarket-Aurora

On December 11, 2013, the First Responders Day Act was passed into law by the Ontario Legislature. It was a rare demonstration of goodwill on the part of all members of the three political parties in the final hours of the legislative session.

The underlying reason for that goodwill and the resulting unanimous consent that allowed my Private Member's Bill to be passed into law, was the indisputable fact that our communities are safe, our homes are protected and our lives are secure because of the dedicated and selfless service of the first responders in our communities.

Following is the bill as it was passed by the legislature:

An Act to Proclaim First Responders Day Bill 15, 2013

Preamble

First responders are those men and women who, in the early stages of an emergency, are responsible for the protection and preservation of life, property, evidence and the environment. They include police officers, firefighters, military personnel, paramedics, medical evacuation pilots, dispatchers, nurses, doctors, emergency medical technicians and emergency managers. First responders are volunteers and professionals who have dedicated their lives to public service. Their life-saving skills often make the difference between life and death. Their public service deserves to be recognized and honoured.

Therefore, Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Ontario, enacts as follows:

May 1 in each year is proclaimed as First Responders Day.

When I first proposed the bill, I stated that it was my hope that by proclaiming First Responders Day, we would make a conscious effort to honour the first responders among us for their contributions to our communities.

As we approach the inaugural First Responders Day, I'm encouraged by plans that are underway. I recently met with United by Trauma members, Sam Reid of Glass Tiger, Nicole Taylor and D/C James Ward. We were joined by Vali Stone whose book entitled, '911-True Tales of Courage and Compassion' was a source of inspiration for the First Responders Day bill.

Celebration plans are underway

Plans include a kick-off celebration on the eve of First Responders Day, April 30 at the Jazz Bistro, 251 Victoria Street, Toronto. On May 1, a reception will be hosted for first responders at Queen's Park by MPPs, followed by formal statements in the Legislature.

Municipalities will be encouraged to make declarations in recognition of first responders and it is my hope that special tributes will be made in school auditoriums and classrooms throughout the province to remind students of all ages of the important contributions that first responders make in our communities.

'An essay contest for students would be an excellent idea!'

I was hosting thirteen year old Michael Sadono for lunch in the legislative dining room a few weeks ago when I took the opportunity to get his advice on how best to engage students in the discussion about First Responders Day.

Michael had made the cut from among hundreds of Grade 7 and 8 students who apply to participate in the Legislative Page Program, and was serving his term as Page. Lunch with Pages from our ridings is a tradition for MPPs and the conversations are always a highlight. And given that the program is designed for high-achieving, community involved students, I knew I could count on solid advice.

'An essay contest for students would be an excellent idea?' offered Michael.

But he was quick to add that it should come with an incentive, 'something like an iPod, with different models for the level of prize.' How could I not take that advice? So here it is:

The Rules for the First Responders Day Essay Contest

Eligibility: All elementary, secondary, college/university level students residing in Newmarket and Aurora;

The essay shall be no more than 300 words in length;

The theme of the essay shall be based on the First Responders Day Act ;

Submissions must be delivered no later than 3 p.m. on Friday April 25, 2014 by email to fklee@frank-klees.on.ca or by fax to (905) 750-0050 or delivered to: 14845 Yonge Street, Suite 201, Aurora L4G 6H8

First, Second and Third Prizes will be awarded in each of the three student categories of elementary, secondary and college/university;

Prizes: First: iPod touch 32GB, Second: iPod touch 16 GB, Third: iPod nano 16GB;

Winners will be determined by a panel consisting of first responders

Winners will be notified no later than April 30, 2014 and will be invited to a special presentation event on May 1st at a location to be determined.

The top three essays will also be published in The Auroran.

Let's make the inaugural First Responders Day a memorable and meaningful day for us all. I look forward to your comments and advice.

www.frankklees.com