

VIEW FROM QUEEN'S PARK: Loyalty points protection, Southlake and more?..

By Chris Ballard, MPP

Newmarket-Aurora

If you collect loyalty points, with plans such as Air Miles, you'll be pleased to know you've got greater protection for your points. Thanks to Liberal MPP Arthur Potts' private members bill, the Consumer Protection Act was just amended to ban expiry dates on reward points, based on time alone. The government will now consult with consumers and business to develop regulations that both protect consumers and ensure loyalty programs remain viable.

Arthur's bill, like my private member's bill to directly election York Region's Chair, demonstrates the important role individual MPPs play in listening to their constituents and proposing fixes.

Local food groups receive funding

The Local Food Investment Fund (LFIF) is a grant program that supports farmers, businesses and not-for-profits in Ontario's agricultural sector that are working to increase the amount of Ontario-grown and produced food purchased and enjoyed across the province. The LFIF is funded by our government and administered by the Greenbelt Fund. That fund has seen a 13-to-one return on investment on its grants made since 2010. That means for every dollar invested, the province sees a \$13 return.

The York Region Food Network. YRFN received \$10,000 that will be used to develop a regional local food guide that will include important information on where to buy local food, how to prepare local ingredients and stories from local producers.

Congratulations!

The recent awards are bringing total funding to \$3 million this year to support 29 different projects across the province.

Southlake Regional Health Centre Funding

The 2016-2017 Ontario Budget announced that the hospital sector would receive an additional \$140 million, improving efficiency and patient care. Southlake received \$2,466,800. Improving wait times and support for families is very important, we are fortunate to have Southlake Regional Health Centre in Newmarket providing essential services. This new funding will continue to build Ontario up and put patient's first.

Aurora Santa Claus Parade

I was proud to take part once again in Aurora's Santa Under the Stars Parade. It is these local events that show just how amazing the residents of Aurora are. It wasn't the greatest weather, but the streets were lined down the entire route with kids of all ages enjoying the floats and bands. Thank you to the town of Aurora for organizing the parade, thank you to all the participants that made it so great and thank you to the people who came out and volunteered for me.

Recognizing all families are equal

Ontario recently passed legislation that will ensure equal treatment for all parents and children in the province. Bill 28, the All Families Are Equal Act, 2016, recognizes the legal status of all parents, whether they are LGBTQ2+ or straight, and whether their children were conceived with or without assistance. The new law, the first update to Ontario's parentage laws since 1978, will provide greater clarity and certainty for parents who use assisted reproduction to conceive a child; provide a streamlined process for the legal recognition of parents who use a surrogate, together with requirements meant to protect the rights of all parties through independent legal advice and confirmation of the surrogate's consent both before conception and after birth; and reduce the need for parents who use assisted reproduction to have to go to court to have their parental status recognized in law. Every child deserves the opportunity to thrive and have the best possible start in life. Ensuring equal recognition for parents and their children is another way Ontario is supporting families across the province.

Bread collection for Aurora Food Pantry

I spent an enjoyable few hours Friday night, together with my wife, Audrey, helping friends Ken and Susanne Whitehurst collect bread from Aurora's Cob's Bread Bakery. Cob's bakeries across Ontario donated bread to local charities, and last Friday the bread was going to Aurora's Food Pantry. First, we unloaded the bread from the shelves and put it in hygienic containers. Then we transported it to the Whitehurst's home where we bagged the bread. It took just a couple of hours to get the job done, but the thought

of pantry users enjoying tasty bread in the days ahead made it an enjoyable task.

So many good things take place behind the scenes in our community, by people who don't do it for recognition or praise, like the Whitehursts. Whether it be the Food Pantry, sports teams, arts and culture, or service clubs, volunteers are what make our town such a caring and great place to live.

As always, I invite you to contact me on any issue. Please call my community office at 905-750-0019, or visit my website at www.ChrisBallardMPP.ca. My email is: cballard.mpp.co@liberal.ola.org. I look forward to hearing from you.