

## Paramedic Services Week marks 25th anniversary of York Region's service

Paramedic Services Week runs through Sunday, May 25, and York Region has plenty of reasons to celebrate.

This year's week coincides with the 25th anniversary of York Region Paramedic Services and, to mark the milestone anniversary, the public is invited to celebrate this Saturday, May 24, with a Family Fun Day.

Family Fun Day will take place at 80 and 90 Bales Drive in East Gwillimbury from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., offering an array of family-friendly activities throughout the day and, of course, a chance to meet the men and women of York Region Paramedic Services that keep the community safe.

The theme of this year's Paramedic Services Week is "We Care. For Everyone." and this theme was very much reflected in a report recently shared at Regional Council by Lisa Gonsalves, Commissioner of Community and Health Services.

"National Paramedic Services Week unites local communities and emergency medical personnel to honour the dedication of those who provide lifesaving services on the frontlines of medicine," she said. "It also raises public awareness about safety issues, including injury prevention and how to respond to medical emergencies. [Family Fun Day] will have activities for children and families and will spotlight important services keeping the Region's communities operating smoothly, including roads, transit, recycling, forest conservation and first responders.

"Over the last 25 years, paramedics have demonstrated bravery, dedication and service to the Region's communities during times of crises. The SARS outbreak of 2003 was a significant global event where Paramedic Services played a critical role in transporting infected patients to hospitals. Several paramedics and other healthcare providers were infected while treating patients with SARS. Learning from this outbreak, the Service implemented enhanced infection prevention and control practices, such as mandatory mask fit testing for staff and conducting initial patient screenings to identify risk.

"The Northeast Power Blackout of 2003 resulted in a loss of power for up to 20 hours across parts of Ontario, including York Region, and parts of the United States. During this outage, Paramedic Services supported local communities by responding to emergencies, sometimes in complete darkness. The Region's stations did not have back-up power generators at that time but are now designed for multi-day independent operation with back-up power. During the H1N1 Influenza Pandemic in 2009, York Region Paramedic Services worked in partnership with York Region Public Health to provide vaccinations across the Region's communities in addition to providing emergency response.

"In 2014, the Ebola Epidemic in West Africa resulted in more than 9,000 cases and the death of more than 150 health care providers. Amidst concerns of global spread, Health Canada and Public Health Ontario directed response planning and preparedness activities. York Region Paramedic Services was tasked to research, develop and implement a response framework that would enable a safe and timely response should the need arise. Although a response was not needed locally, learnings from the planning exercises resulted in a more robust response model that would eventually be beneficial during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Paramedic Services also played a key role in supporting York Region residents during the recent COVID-19 pandemic. Paramedics led immunization clinics for seniors in the community, as well as staff and residents of congregate living settings; ran COVID-19 testing sites at transitional housing sites, long-term and congregate care settings and at Paramedic Services headquarters; provided primary care, mental health and additional support for people experiencing homelessness; and continued to respond to 911 calls."

Among the innovations made by York Region Paramedic Services cited by Gonsalves are partnering with area fire services to expand access to Automated External Defibrillators; creating a Special Response Unit to provide tactical medical support for high-risk warrants, barricades, hostage rescues, vehicle takedowns, active shooters, and bomb threats; establishing a Dedicated Offload Nurse Program; spearheading community paramedicine programs and improving patient access in the community.

"York Region Paramedic Services was one of the first paramedic services to launch a community paramedicine program in Canada,

which provides residents with a range of clinical supports through home visits and clinics in seniors' housing, long-term care homes, subsidized and emergency housing and drop-in centres. The program prevents frequent 911 calls by providing proactive care, increases healthcare access for at-risk populations and empowers patients to manage chronic disease, resulting in improved health outcomes and improved quality of life. Launched in April 2024, [the Improving Patient Access and Care in the Community] initiative is an innovative new model of care that integrates paramedics into the broader healthcare system to perform enhanced diagnostics, provide on-scene treatment, discharge patients at the scene, transport them to appropriate non-hospital destinations and coordinate care with healthcare partners.

?Paramedic Services Week 2025 is an important way to acknowledge contributions of Paramedic Services Staff and is part of a year-long celebration to showcase their achievements in the last 25 years and engage the community.?

**By Brock Weir**