

People take First Responders for granted, says Klees

By Brock Weir

It was a disappointment to many supporters when the initiative to implement First Responders Day in Ontario all but died when former premier Dalton McGuinty prorogued parliament last year, but the momentum wasn't hard to re-build to designate, according to proponent Frank Klees.

The Newmarket-Aurora MPP renewed his commitment to make the commemorative day a reality with a private members bill when the Legislature re-opened last month.

‘It is now my intention to put forward a unanimous consent motion in the legislature that given the fact the bill was debate for a second reading and passed unanimously, that rather than go through the process again, that it would be allowed to go through to third reading and brought into law,’ Mr. Klees tells The Auroran. ‘I am hopeful that I will get the cooperation from the House and it will be put into place.’

Mr. Klees says it is important that ‘citizens are aware of the significance first responders play in our community’, significance, he adds, that is often taken for granted.

‘We take for granted the role of police officers, fire fighters, paramedics and dispatchers, take for granted the role of our military who are on the front lines in search and rescue, for example,’ he says. ‘These are individuals who are sacrificing a great deal. Their hours are challenging. The physical and mental challenges are often hidden. PTSD is something that is often not spoke about because of the unwritten rule within those professions that you don't admit weaknesses.’

‘The fact is many people suffer as a result of the incidents that they have to respond to and I think there are two things we need to do: the first thing is to appreciate what First Responders do in our communities; and second to have more empathy for not only the first responders, but their families as well who suffer along with them when they are forced to deal with these physical and often emotional challenges that these people go through.’

Going one step further with simple recognition to an Ontario-wide day to put this recognition into action was both a reaction and a response, he said, to coming face to face with first responders ‘and their families ‘ themselves.

‘I think it is very important [so] we are able through our schools to bring this to the attention and set aside perhaps some time in assembly where teachers would have an opportunity focus students on doing projects and giving recognition to what we're going to have on June 1 where the community comes together, connect with first responders, and see them in a different light.’