

## Toys for Tickets can turn a negative into a positive for families in need



Turning lemons into lemonade might be more of a summer thing, but until December 13 you can do just that by converting your parking ticket into a gift for local kids and families in need.

Aurora's Toys for Tickets campaign is now underway and, for any parking infractions issued between November 20 and December 13, you can come into Town Hall or the Joint Operations Centre to pay off your ticket with a toy of equal or greater value to the cost of the notice.

And, this year, all parking tickets are eligible for the program ? including notice of offences related to ?parking in a fire route?, ?parking in an accessible parking space,? and ?obstructing an accessible parking space.?

?We just figured at the end of the day the community needs it ? it's not about us taking in money or trying to capitalize on this ? if we recognize that those higher tickets may also bring in more toys and more goods for those in need, then it is the right thing to do,? says Bylaw Manager Alexander Wray, explaining the change.

Last year's campaign was ?very successful,? he notes, adding that in-take was ?slow? during the pandemic years because not as many people were on the road. 2023 was a return to making things merry at greater levels and the Bylaw Department is hoping this success holds through 2024.

?Ultimately, at the end of the day, the toys that are donated from the tickets are for children in need within the York Region community, more specifically, the Newmarket-Aurora part of Town ? it is beneficial and it is hopeful!? says Wray.

This year, the local Toys for Tickets program is benefiting the Holiday Heroes Campaign spearheaded by the York Regional Police and York Regional Police Association, in conjunction with the Salvation Army's Northridge Community Church.

Toys, food and gift cards are always welcome ? with a preference for toys, says Wray ? but it's important to remember the older kids and teens in the community as well.

?Oftentimes we see toys for younger children, but it is also very challenging to get toys for older kids,? he says. ?Even sometimes simple necessities like deodorant, body wash, shaving kits that maybe older teens would need and are still living at home with mom and dad are also beneficial if members of the community are able to give.?

All people need to do is come in with their parking ticket and their toy, gift card or food donation, and a receipt with a total ? or combination thereof if donating multiple toys ? that matches the fine on the ticket.

?At the end of the day, I think when people receive the parking ticket or the penalty notice they see it as a point of frustration, but when there is an opportunity to make good of that experience, usually people are pretty happy and pretty receptive to that,? says Wray. ?As happy as they are going to be coming in to pay a parking ticket! They recognize the value, they recognize it is a way to give back to the community ? and it is a very easy way to give back. The feedback is very positive and that's why we continue to run the program.?

While it doesn't apply to any cost off your parking ticket, Wray also encourages residents to use this opportunity to also donate pet food for the shelter contracted by the Town for animal control.

?As people get into the holiday season, there are pressures on people's budgets and finances. It is challenging out there right now and that goes for pet owners, too,? he says. ?If people do happen to bring in bags of dog food, cat food, just willingly, it's not part of this program but we will ensure it gets up to the shelter and distributed to people in need.?

**By Brock Weir**