

VIEW FROM QUEEN'S PARK: 30x30 challenge

By Chris Ballard, MPP
Newmarket-Aurora

The summer is in full swing, and soon the August long weekend will be upon us. There have been many activities and lots of great news for residents of Newmarket-Aurora ? and Ontario. Ontario Parks have introduced the 30x30 challenge in August, to encourage Ontarians to get outside, recharge their connection with nature, all while improving health and mental well-being. The 30x30 challenge was created by the David Suzuki Foundation. It challenges people to reconnect with nature by spending 30 minutes a day outside for 30 days. Even if you can't get to a park or trail you can still find nature in your own backyard. Spending time outside can help boost your immune system, decrease stress, and help alleviate symptoms of some mental health issues. There are many wonderful parks and trails across the province ? and throughout Newmarket and Aurora ? to help with your challenge. The Ontario Parks website can be a great resource for finding out what Parks are close to you, and has many ideas for what you can do for your 30x30 Challenge. If you're looking to get away or try a different view you could try the accessible playground at Murphy's Point or borrow an all-terrain wheelchair at Killbear to enjoy the trails, or spend some time at the beach. Ontario Parks is also giving you an incentive to meet your nature commitment, on August 16, all provincial parks across Ontario will be offering free day use to help re-energize and complete the last half of the 30x30 Challenge! By accepting the 30x30 Challenge, you are committing to a healthy lifestyle.

2017 Canada Summer Games

The 2017 Canada Summer Games officially opened July 28 and will run until August 13. Ontario is represented by 450 athletes, coaches, managers, support staff, technicians and mission staff in this year's host city of Winnipeg. Participating and competing at the Canada Summer Games allows Ontario's athletes to gain experience and understand what they need to excel on the world stage. This year's games will see more than 4,000 athletes from all across Canada's provinces and territories. Ontario continues to support its amateur athletes as part of Game ON: The Ontario Government's Sport Plan. A key priority of Game ON is our Quest for Gold which supports athletes and provides direct funding to high performance athletes to help with the costs of living, training, sports equipment, coaching and travel to competitions. This year, 105 athletes competing at the Canada Summer Games are receiving Quest for Gold funding.

Gender Equality

Along with the Quest for Gold, Ontario is also taking action to close the gender gap to give women and girls equal access to opportunities in the sport and recreation sector. Last week, Eleanor McMahon, Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport, announced the Advancing Opportunities for Women and Girls in Sport: Ontario's Action Plan. The plan will outline new initiatives to help increase the number of women and girls who are athletes, coaches, sport administrators and leaders at schools, universities and communities across the province. In Newmarket?Aurora there are many active sports clubs that have always supported initiatives like this one, and will continue to do so.

Blitzing the Moraine

I recently had the honour of presenting an Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) grant to the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust. The grant project will build on the success of an already proven model and program, they will receive a \$207,600 grant over 35 months to deliver and expand the Citizen Science Bioblitz project. This project encourages people to support a healthy and sustainable environment, and is helping people connect with the environment and understand their impact on it. The stewardship programs are designed to improve the ecological integrity of lands that are owned by the Oak Ridges Moraine by

tree planting, riparian area restoration, meadow maintenance, and specific projects to improve habitat for species at risk in Ontario. The Oak Ridges Moraine's most important function is sustaining the health of the many watersheds and the diversity of species that live within them, sixty per cent of the Moraine is in the Greater Toronto Area (Peel, York and Durham Regions). To date, Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust protects 47 properties totalling over 3,700 acres ensuring that these lands continue to contribute to the ecological integrity of the Greenbelt and Oak Ridges Moraine. Protection is less expensive than restoration.

And finally?

You may have heard that the Premier has recently appointed me Ontario's Minister of Environment and Climate Change. I deeply appreciate her confidence in me as I take over this major portfolio. Having grown up in this area, I am steeped in the importance of the natural environment, especially the Oak Ridges Moraine and the water it protects. I am constantly amazed at the importance folks in Newmarket-Aurora place on preserving the Moraine and our environment. I'll do my best to help us all address the challenge of a changing climate and the environment. Thank you everyone who sent me congratulations ?

I value your trust.