

VIEW FROM QUEEN'S PARK: 360 Kids

By Chris Ballard, MPP

Newmarket-Aurora

Last week, 360 Kids said goodbye to its executive director, Michael Braithwaite, who will be joining Raising the Roof to help tackle homelessness on a national scale.

Michael was an integral part of the 360 Kids team for over six-and-a-half years. He is well respected in the community and has always been a strong advocate for youth and the fight to end homelessness. Michael's vision, adopted by organizations throughout Ontario, is that every kid matters. I am assured that Michael leaves behind a strong team that will continue to build on the vision and mission at 360 Kids.

One of the programs 360 Kids is moving forward with is Nightstop. This program has been successfully running in the United Kingdom for the past 30 years and 360 Kids is the first North American organization to implement it.

Nightstop is a volunteer program in which youth are invited to stay in the home of a volunteer community member for a short or long-term period. The host volunteers are screened and trained to take low-risk homeless youth into their homes.

This is another way that we can help fight homelessness in our communities and prevent our youth from ending up on the streets of Toronto ? and the horrific life that can follow. If you or anyone you know would be interested in becoming a volunteer Nightstop host, please contact the Nightstop Coordinator, Jacquie Hermans at jhermans@360kids.ca.

Toll Roads

Last week, the government announced it is doubling the Gas Tax dollar program for 99 communities across Ontario, including Newmarket and Aurora. We will provide York Region with reliable, long-term funding to improve and expand its local transit systems and offer more travel options for commuters and families.

By saying ?no? to Toronto's request for road tolls, we are listening to the concerns of individuals who are frustrated by their daily commute.

Premier Wynne clearly stated the province's philosophy around toll roads is to only allow them where there are public transit alternatives to private vehicle travel. The \$168 million Toronto said it would raise through tolls will be more than covered by its portion of the Gas Tax program.

Starting in 2019, Ontario will increase funding for local transit through an enhancement to the existing gas tax program, doubling the municipal share from two cents per litre to four cents by 2021. There will be no increase in the tax that people in Ontario pay on gasoline as a result of the enhancement to the program.

Cities and towns receiving the new funding are able to plan for and make major infrastructure upgrades, buy additional transit vehicles, add more routes, extend hours of service, implement fare strategies and improve accessibility.

Our Government recognizes that commuters need reliable transit options before revenue generating measures such as road tolls are considered. That is why we are not supporting plans for municipal road tolls at this time. We will continue to invest heavily in transit infrastructure in Toronto ? more than any other provincial government in history ? as well as across the GTHA and across Ontario.

Bingo World

I had the pleasure of attending an event at Newmarket's Bingo World last week to celebrate the \$3 million raised by Newmarket Charitable Gaming Association Charities since 2013.

The Ontario Charitable Gaming Association is a provincial organization that represents the interests of Charities and non-profits that fundraise through charitable gaming.

Funds generated at Newmarket's Bingo Word benefit 35 local charities and non-profit organizations within Newmarket-Aurora that support mental health services, services to children and families, health research, service clubs, housing programs, cultural groups and youth sports.

I am proud to be part of a Government that supports such amazing initiatives. Through OLG's partnership with charities, municipalities and the private sector, 31 charitable gaming centres in operate across Ontario supporting 1,800 charities and non-profits. To date over \$135 million has been raised across Ontario.

Chinese New Years

Gong Hey Fat Choy ? wishing all those celebrating the Chinese New Year happiness and prosperity. This year is the year of the Rooster. The rooster is the tenth animal on the Chinese zodiac. In addition to the year of the rooster the Chinese element theory also comes into play. This year is the fire element making this the year of the Fire Rooster, this only happens once in a 60-year cycle. It is widely believed that a person's characteristics are decided by both their birth year zodiac sign and their element.

I was honoured to attend a private Chinese New Year's celebration hosted by the Aurora International School on January 22. It was a great way to kick-off the New Year with performances by students of all ages.

A second public event is taking place at the Newmarket Old Town Hall, 460 Botsford St., on Sunday, February 5, 12..30 p.m. to 3.30 p.m. This event will be hosted in Newmarket by the Federation of Chinese Canadians in York Region and Wasim Jarrah Real Estate Services. The celebration is open to all and will include a lion dance, cultural songs, a Kung-Fu show and authentic Chinese food.

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.