

VIEW FROM QUEEN'S PARK: Excitement and Legacy

Pan Am and Parapan Am Games mean excitement and legacy

By Chris Ballard, MPP

Newmarket-Aurora

The Pan Am Games are the largest multi-sport games in Canadian history. Bigger than the Vancouver Olympics. Bigger than the Montreal Olympics.

By now you've been inundated with news stories and advertising about the games. I hope you've caught at least a little of the Pan Am/Parapan Am sports fervor. It is exciting.

Scheduled every four years ? one year before the Summer Olympic Games ? the Pan/Parapan American Games present high performance athletic competition, excitement and sportsmanship.

Let's look at the numbers: Close to 10,000 athletes and officials from across Latin America, South America, the Caribbean and North America will put their years of intense training, perseverance and sacrifice to the test in world-class competition in 36 Pan Am sports and 15 Parapan Am sports. All this will take place in an area spanning 5,300 square kilometers and 15 host municipalities. Not only will the games showcase Ontario as a premier sporting destination, they will attract close to 250,000 visitors and are expected to create upwards of 26,000 jobs and pump an estimated \$3.7 billion into Ontario's GDP.

The Pan Am Games run July 10 to 26 and the Parapan Am games August 7 to 15 in venues in and around the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area. You can find information at toronto2015.org.

The Pan Am torch arrived in Aurora on Thursday. It was great to see the hundreds of people lining Yonge and Wellington Streets as the torch bearers ? each carrying the flame about 200 metres ? made their way to Lambert Willson Park for a celebration.

Our government is proud to be able to help support celebrations of the torch relay in Newmarket-Aurora and in more than 130 other communities across the province.

Last week's Auroran carried an excellent story about the three torch bearers my office was honoured to nominate. We looked for people who exemplify frontline service to our community.

Dan Phillion is a single father of three and an avid advocate and fundraiser for muscular dystrophy. He was a volunteer for 10 years at the annual Friendly Neighborhood Road Hockey Challenge. Dan also participated in York Region's social audit, Behind the Masks, for the Region of York and the Ontario Governments; to help reduce the effects of poverty.

Being involved in the community has always been something close to Melissa Blair's heart. One of the first girls to join Scouting when it became co-ed, she has been a Cub leader for more than eight years. Melissa is a Corporal in the Canadian Armed Forces Reservists with the Queens York Rangers 1st American Regiment based in Aurora.

Arlene Lindsay is a mother, a grandmother ? and an advocate for organ and tissue donation awareness. She is a very active member of the York Region Gift of Life Association. Arlene is also a member of the Canadian Transplant Association. Arlene's hope is to create awareness about organ tissue donation. She had a liver donation herself 23 years ago and remains active in sports. Arlene is also celebrating almost eight years as a volunteer for CHATS.

Thank you to our torch bearers ? and thank you to everyone who gathered to honour our torch bearers ? and the spirit of the Pan Am and Parapan Am games.

More interesting facts about the games: the cost to build the venues and run the games is estimated at \$1.4 billion. Of that, about \$500 million is being contributed by the province, with the rest coming from the federal government, municipalities and universities. Like other host jurisdictions, the government is making additional significant investments that will serve the Games for a short time but will serve Ontarians for decades.

This includes capital investments for provincial priority projects including the Athlete's Village which will revitalize the eastern Toronto Port Lands, the Hamilton Stadium and the Goldring Centre.

Not all sports are taking place in the GTA. I've purchased my tickets for two Pan Am events ? shooting at the Toronto International Trap & Skeet Club in Innisfil and mountain biking at Hardwood Mountain Bike Park in Oro Station. They will be action-packed days.

If you are heading to a GTHA event, Ontario and its transit partners are making it easier to get to the games by supporting free, accessible public transit for event ticketholders. On the day of ticketed event, spectators can show their games competition or ceremonies ticket to get on any of the 14 public transit or specialized transit systems for people with disabilities in the Games region. In our area, that includes GO Transit, the Toronto Transit Commission and Wheel-Trans, and York Region Transit, VIVA and

York's Mobility Plus.

Besides bringing top-notch athletes together for exciting events, the Pan Am/Parapan Am games will leave a legacy of housing and sporting facilities that will be used for years to come. A final bit of news ? media reports earlier this month say the games will come in under budget by approximately \$54 million. Now there's something also worth celebrating.

If you would like to contact me on any issue, please call my community office at 905-750-0019, or visit my website at www.ChrisBallardMPP.ca. I look forward to hearing from you.