

VIEW FROM QUEEN'S PARK: Happy New Year!

By Chris Ballard, MPP

Newmarket-Aurora

From my family to yours, I hope 2017 is a great year for you. I hope you can join me for my New Year's Levee on January 15, from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at the newly renovated Newmarket Old Town Hall, 460 Botsford Street.

The end of year and the beginning of a new one always prompts me to take stock on all that happened. As I consider 2016 and think about the year ahead, I continue to realize what an amazing community we live in. For example, I recently attended the annual Battle of York hockey game between the Newmarket Hurricanes and the Aurora Tigers. The friendly, but usually bruising, rivalry between the Newmarket and Aurora hockey teams has been going on for years. You'll witness some of the best hockey around when these teams face off.

For the past 11 years the teams play a game in honour of Kevin Lord, K.J Ramolla and Josh Sedore with all proceeds going to the Cancer Centre at Southlake. This game is played every year, not because it's the holiday season, but because they are organizations that truly care about giving back.

This is a lesson for all of us ? the holidays may be over and the traditional time of giving past, but there is still great need.

Homelessness and poverty affect people ? young and old, male and female ? year ?round. Homelessness isn't just a government issue, it's a community issue affecting towns and cities, rich and poor, across Ontario. And it will take a community to help turn things around.

During the holidays a number of organizations ask for our help through donations or volunteer hours. It's one of the busiest times of the year, but what most people don't realize is that these charities continue to need help after the holidays have ended. We have so many deserving organizations in Aurora and Newmarket and throughout York Region that can use your help.

With my work at Queen's Park focused on homelessness and poverty, I wanted to highlight a few deserving organizations in our area for your consideration. Blue Door Shelters is one of the local organizations that can always use help.

The shelter first opened in 1982 as an emergency shelter for men (Porter Place) and has now expanded to include a shelter for families (Leeder Place) and a Youth shelter. Blue Door Shelters can always use toiletries, footwear, clothing, housewares, linens, infant items and gift cards or non-perishable food items.

Blue Door Shelters also values volunteers as an integral part of its team, you can find more information on their website, www.bluedoorshelters.ca.

Belinda's Place is a fairly new addition to York Region. Serving all of York Region, Belinda's Place provides basic needs, temporary housing, client-focused, wrap-around supports and follow-up services for women who are homeless or are at risk of becoming so.

The Salvation Army Thrift Store in Newmarket will take all new and gently used items on behalf on Belinda's Place. If you want to make food donations, they will happily accept donations on site. Monetary donations are also accepted through their secure donation page, the link is on their website. Like the many other organizations, Belinda's Place values their volunteers and has many different opportunities to get involved. You can learn more on their website at www.belindasplace.ca.

Inn From the Cold has been operating in Newmarket since 2004, when it opened its first warming centre at Newmarket's Old Town Hall. In 2007, the group moved to its current location and is now open seven days a week. In 2012 the organization implemented an employment program and a health and wellness service. Today, Inn From the Cold is a hub that gives guests access to different services that help them move in a positive direction to achieve success. Inn From the Cold needs toiletries, clothes and non-perishable food items. Volunteers are also welcomed from November to the end of March. For information visit their website at www.innfromthecold.ca.

Two organizations that are outside of Newmarket and Aurora but still help so many people in our community are 360 Kids and the Sutton Youth Shelter. Both of these amazing places offer help for youth ages 16-26 years of age, they provide basic necessities including food, clothing and services. The needs of these organizations are very similar to all of the above, toiletries, food, clothes, kitchenwares and linens. Volunteers are always welcome to help meet the needs of these at risk youth. Their websites are www.360kids.ca and www.suttonyouthshelter.ca.

There are so many ways you can help make our community an even better place. Local service clubs like Rotary, Lion's Club and Optimists are always in need of members and volunteers. The Food Pantries in Aurora and Newmarket are always thankful for donations of food and cash. The point is to get involved you don't have to help all the organizations, but pick one, support them and help bring homelessness to an end.

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.