

Caledon Optimist Club celebrates 33 years in the community



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For those who haven't heard the good news, the Optimist Club is celebrating its centennial worldwide this year. Around the globe, the organization committed to creating a more positive future for the world's children is ringing in its hundred-year anniversary with the powerful, positive force of its members. Susan Montgomery, two-term President and Treasurer of Caledon's Optimist Club, is proud to celebrate the big anniversary, but more importantly she wants to revel in the achievements and bring attention to the Caledon chapter's 33 years of serving the community.

In the Optimist Club's headquarters in Caledon Village, long tables with plaques from youth sports teams and medals from contest winners line the main hall where the celebration is taking place on a snowy Saturday on March 2nd. Members of the local OPP and politicians such as Ward 1 Councillor Ian Sinclair are present despite the weather to celebrate all the good works- past, present, and future, the Optimist Club promotes in service of Caledon's youth. Montgomery states that the mission of the Club is "hopefully to improve the lives of children, the community, and ourselves. We like to help children in need." A few programs include the Christmas Shop with a Cop, Halloween pumpkin carving parties at the Alton public school, partnering with the OPP for youth leadership programs in the summer, and essay and rhetoric competitions that encourage Caledon's kids to improve their skills while winning scholarship money for university. These programs, which develop youth leadership and communication skills, are supported by fundraising efforts by club members such as the toll road in Belfountain twice annually and Euchre nights held four times a year, which Montgomery describes as "a fun evening as well as a little fundraiser."

However, while the Club has reached its hundred-year birthday, it is in increasing need of both members and funding to continue. "There's a whole bunch of programs I'd like to run," says Montgomery, speaking of possible future projects and fundraisers, "but we

really need more members. We're down to about ten active members.?

Denise Nacev, the Governor of the Central Ontario District, speaks of the ?hundred years of impacting children all over the world?The cool part of the Optimist organization is we get to see the direct impact of our programs in our communities. One of our best examples our Junior Optimist program for youths. From ages 6-18, they get to run their own club?the leadership skills they get to learn are incredible?The coolest thing is that if you have that super quiet, shy child, the Optimist Club can bring the best qualities of that child forward?Optimist Clubs are very necessary in this day and age when they [children] could so easily go in a bad direction.?

Events coming up this year include an essay contest where children who go onto district can compete for a \$2500 scholarship, an oratorical contest taking place in April where again there is a chance to win a scholarship at the district level, and a new event for elementary school children, Kids Speak Out, in May. When asked what sort of events she'd like to put on if she had the funds and volunteers, Montgomery cites a bike rodeo or ?Safety on Wheels? event as well as a Tristar competition.

About getting involved, Nacev cites her own family's example, with multiple generations having been involved as participants and now as members and leaders for years. ?It's the kind of organization where an entire family can get involved.?

When asked why she became involved with the Optimist Club 23 years ago, Montgomery says, ?I got asked, and I thought, after running minor softball in the Village for eight years, it fit in with what I'd already been doing with kids, because I like doing things for kids.?

A noble and powerful incentive, it's no wonder the Optimist Club has reached its hundredth anniversary. ?So many organizations don't get to be 100,? comments Nacev. ?For us to be 100 years old and get to bring out the best in our community, our peers, and our children is a huge milestone that I think we all can celebrate.?