This page was exported from - Caledon Citizen
Export date: Thu Mar 28 8:42:30 2024 / +0000 GMT

Setting the Tone

Written By BROCK WEIR

It might as well have been a lifetime ago, it seems a world away and, in some respects, I wouldn't mind the chance to hit the rewind button for a few seconds to make a few tweaks. Of course, all this comes with the benefit of hindsight.

Around this time last year, we were preparing to wind down the paper for a week ahead of ringing in the New Year.

It was, at least on the surface, a holiday season like any other. We gathered, as we did every year, at an area restaurant for the office Christmas party, a great opportunity to catch up with our coworkers before we each went our separate ways for the couple of weeks that followed.

Even our ?separate ways? were almost routine, going to visit friends, breaking bread with family, getting a few last-minute items and, if you were lucky enough, putting the finishing touches on some long-held travel plans.

For me, the routine was almost invariable. There were two Christmas dinners to attend, there was some much-needed downtime, and the only thing that seemed slightly amiss was the rest of the time was a staycation due to some logistics that couldn't be worked out.

So, the objective was finding New Year's fun close to home.

Thankfully, many friends were also staying close to home last December 31, so we started the early afternoon at a relatively new boardgame café. A delightful few hours poring over murder mystery strategy was followed by a wonderful dinner out and, shortly thereafter, meeting another group of friends a few hours later to ring in 2020 at a bar dedicated to vintage pinball.

Despite the cacophony of game cabinets, it was a nice, relaxing and calm way to close out 2019.

Over the last decade or so, I've made a concerted effort to celebrate the New Year doing something I've never done before. It doesn't have to be big. In fact, it can range from spending the occasion with friends I have just met to turning it up to eleven in Times Square.

Call me superstitious, but I like to think that how you ring in the New Year can help set the tone for the next 12 months. So, the year that is almost in the history books should have had some semblance of relaxation and calmness to it, right? Fat chance.

Although we had heard the first rumblings of a virus heading our way just before the New Year, the excitement the endless possibilities a New Year can bring came to a halt little over a week later with the downing of a plane over Tehran on January 8, claiming the lives of 176 people including, locally, Dr. Parisa Eghbalian and her daughter Reera Esmaeilion.

The deaths of all those lost in the crash saw a moving display of grief which swept across the country, including York Region, where many members of the Iranian community have settled and planted new roots.

A community vigil at the Dr. Bette Stephenson Centre for Learning, which brought out hundreds on a cold January night, was warmed with unity. Of course, there was anger in the air, but there was a moving sense of the power of people coming together in both grief and determination to find better days ahead.

We all know what happened in the months that followed.

Within a month, we knew there were more challenges on the horizon. Another month still, we realized these challenges were going to be greater than we had previously anticipated. One more month, it was clear there would probably be no fully going back to the

world we had taken for granted, at least for the foreseeable future, and we were in for a long slog together.

And yet, as I sit down to write this end-of-year column, I find I am buoyed by the good news stories that have come out of adversity.

We have had people taking time out of their day to come out of their front doors to bang pots and pans in solidarity with our frontline heroes. We have seen kids and teens harness their musical talents for the greater good, taking on the challenge of mounting driveway jam sessions to not only entertain neighbours but collect donations for local food banks in the process, or coming out onto their porch every night to play the bagpipes as frontline workers change shifts.

We have seen businesses pivot their operations towards the development of PPE, including face masks and, in the case of Beattie's Distillers, amongst others, shaking up their vodka and gin lines with lines of hand sanitizer. Medical professionals have also been stepping up to the plate with pivots of their own, including Dr. Kaveh Kavoosi, a doctor at Stevenson Memorial Hospital, developing the ?Tube in a Cube? to help stop the spread.

We have seen community organizations step up to the plate with renewed vigour to help those in our communities make ends meet and residents redouble their efforts to shop local as small businesses struggle to survive.

We have seen hundreds of people take the necessary precautions to safely stand up against systemic racism and racial injustice in the hopes of creating a better world.

We have seen men and women who stepped up to the plate to serve their country in the darkest days of the Second World War answer the call again, whether they are soldiers, bowed with age, walking to raise money for frontline heroes or former Land Girls who kept allied nations fed during the conflict rallying their neighbourhoods and residences to collect non-perishables.

Perhaps most importantly, we have seen a redefining of what it means to be a frontline hero and a renewed and newfound appreciation for not only our doctors and nurses, but our teachers, school support staff and caretakers, store owners and grocery clerks, all of those who have gone above and beyond the call of duty to keep us healthy, safe and fed amid this turmoil.

In a year where we have to count our wins where we can find them, these are the instances I will express gratitude for over Christmas and through New Year's. I think they will also be my key takeaways as the light at the end of the tunnel continues to grow.

This New Year's, it will be tough to avoid doing something new or celebrating in a new way, whether we like it or not. But, if this year has taught us anything, how you set the tone is ultimately up to you. It might not work out the way you planned, but it's worth a shot.

I wish you all a safe and merry Christmas, a happy and healthy New Year. We'll see you back here on January 7.