

## 4th Annual Valleywood Block Party draws big crowd and bigger support for community

**By Riley Murphy**

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The fourth annual Valleywood block party drew many visitors, local vendors and businesses, entertainment, and an array of food choices, with laughter and music heard down the block.

The event, hosted by Sonia D'Alimonte and Abhiraj Kumar, with Valleywood Community events, gets bigger every year.

One major draw is the well-known and loved dunk tank.

Attendees are invited to try to dunk their local Councillors, community members, and friends for a small price.

That money is given back to the community each year through various organizations.

This year, all proceeds from the dunk tank were given to BrightStart Caledon to support their free programs and services across Caledon.

Sonia D'Alimonte, a Valleywood resident and volunteer event coordinator for the event, said they began the block party in 2022 as a means of bringing the community together after the COVID-19 pandemic.

She shared that every year it's been such a success that they keep bringing it back.

"Not only is it a block party to bring community, neighbors, family together, but we want to ensure that we're always giving back," explained D'Alimonte. "We do our Dunk Tank fundraiser and it's a different organization every year that we support."

"We always have entertainment to support local artists, we support the local economy through small businesses and artists and crafters. We also support community organizations by giving them space here to raise awareness of what they're doing in the Caledon area," continued D'Alimonte.

D'Alimonte said BrightStart Caledon has been involved with the event since its first year.

"They've always been happy to come out and offer activities for the young kids and their families. So, we thought this is the year to ensure that they're the beneficiary of our fundraising," she says.

She has seen the event grow from 200 attendees to more than 500 in recent years.

D'Alimonte said the event may be held in Valleywood, but it's for everyone.

"It's the Valleywood Block Party, but really it's about connecting communities. Valleywood with the rest of the community that all surrounds us. Whether that's North Brampton, whether that's Southfield, whether it's Caledon Village and beyond, we just want everyone to come out."

The Dunk Tank by this time was drawing a massive crowd of volunteers to take a dip, and one recognizable face in that lineup was Ward 4, 5 and 6 Regional Councillor Mario Russo.

Russo shared that he not only sat in this tank this year, but also the past year.

‘It’s fun community stuff that we’re doing and if you can have fun and actually donate to a worthy cause, it’s something that I’m happy to support in any way I can,’ shared Russo.

For future attendees, be warned, Russo says the anticipation of getting dunked is worse than the actual dunking.

Russo shared that it was exceptional to see the whole community come out and not only show up, but also show their support.

‘[That] can’t be replicated. It happens organically. We can put the proper tools in place, whether it be the fields here or the actual environment. But the actual community engagement piece is the community itself coming out and supporting itself. It’s fun to be part of that,’ he says. ‘I wanted to thank Sonia, Abhiraj and all the volunteers for what they do. Not just today but at a lot of events here in Caledon and specifically in Valleywood.’

Russo wasn’t the only participant eagerly awaiting being dunked.

Griffin, Tyson, and Weston each took multiple turns getting dunked, often by each other.

The two brothers and their cousin shared that it was the perfect refreshment for a hot day.

Regional Councillor Early for Wards 1, 2, and 3 has attended the event since its inception and shared that she has even noticed extra vendors this year coming out.

‘I’m such a big fan of Abhiraj and Sonia. They work so hard in the community to put on this event. They raise money for good causes, but mostly they just work really, really hard to ensure that we have a significant community feeling in Valleywood. They’ve been pillars in this community, so I’m always happy to support them.’

Hunar Kahlon, chairperson for Caledon South Asian Association, has also been attending the event since day one.

‘When the community comes together, this is what Caledon is all about,’ says Kahlon.

Kahlon shared he hopes this will remain a yearly tradition.

‘We need more of this in every pocket of Caledon. Caledon’s huge, Caledon’s diverse and it’s growing and we need to understand the way it’s growing and we need to understand that these events help them in terms of bringing people together, showing them at the end of the day that we are all human beings and we care for each other, we care for the community we live in.’

The event featured local entertainment from Daniela Soltero, performances by Ms. Marianne Power of Performing Arts Dancers, and DJ Magic.

Some came to check out the local vendors, some to pick up the wide range of food, and some to voice their thoughts to their local Councillors.

‘One of the most important parts of being a Councillor is staying connected with residents, and community gatherings like the Valleywood Block Party make that possible in such a meaningful way,’ says Councillor Sheen for Ward 2. ‘It’s not just a fun neighbourhood tradition, it’s also a chance for people to come up, share what’s on their mind, and know they’re being heard.’

He shared that at the event, residents raised issues such as the park benches, parking challenges, and the rapid pace of development in Caledon.

Sheen says those conversations help ensure he brings real community concerns to the Council.

?Events like this are also about more than sharing concerns, they're about building understanding. Valleywood, like much of Caledon, is growing and becoming more diverse, and a block party is one of those opportunities where neighbours of all backgrounds can come together, talk face-to-face, and remember that we all want to see our community thrive. When you actually show up at events like these, meet your neighbours, and take part in the event, you quickly see how much we all share in common and how invested people are in this place.?

?I especially want to recognize Sonia Gonzalez-D'Alimonte and Abhiraj Kumar, whose volunteer efforts have made this wonderful event happen for a fourth year in a row,? he added. ?Our community is stronger thanks to people like them who give their time and heart to bring neighbours together.?

The day wrapped up with a fun foam party for all, with the hope of seeing the same success for years to come.