

A Different 'Few Good People'?

by SHERALYN ROMAN

Never more so than now, we need an informed, engaged and questioning electorate. A few weeks ago, I talked about Margaret Mead and the role of the individual in society in making change. Two weeks ago, I wrote about the need for a 'few good people' to take such action one step further by considering politics as the means to make such a change. Today, in a follow-up to both columns, and after some interesting conversations I have been having with people from across Caledon, I have a different exhortation.

This is directed at the majority of us: the people who have no intention of ever delegating at Council, or protesting on the side of the road. You don't have to, but you can still make a difference. How? We need a few good people (preferably far more) to vote responsibly.

No doubt Caledon residents are feeling jaded right now and frankly, rightly so. It feels as though we are being handed over to the province, developers, and freight and logistics firms on a silver platter. You want more land? Here's an MZO. You want to build a highway smack dab through the middle of Caledon? Here's some prime agriculture acreage, oh and don't worry about the environmental impact. I could go on, and often have, but you get the idea.

On the flip side. I've spoken with people who aren't jaded, but it's because they have no real idea of what's happening in our community at all. Some aren't even sure who makes the various government-level decisions impacting our future. Everyone knows traffic and trucking are a nightmare, but while it seems hard to believe; quarries, groundwater contamination, threats to our environment, and the financial impacts of provincial downloading of responsibilities to municipalities, aren't on the radar for many Caledon residents. They should be. That's what I mean when I say we need 'a different, few good people.' You might not be interested in running for office, but we need informed and engaged residents running to the polls in October to vote.

We don't yet know who is on the ballot, but that time is rapidly approaching. As early as May 1 we will have some idea of who is in the race. If it's an incumbent, you need to ask them hard questions about positions they have taken in the past, how they have voted on contentious issues and whether their values align with the interests of the community they were elected to serve or to other outside influences. For new candidates, it's harder to gauge, but you might ask about their past record of service in the community, volunteering, or advocating for Caledon on specific issues, or what they feel gives them the skills, knowledge and tools necessary to be a Councillor. To do any of this however, you first have to know what municipal government is responsible for and what the issues facing Caledon are.

Get informed! Caledon is on the cusp of even greater change. Look to your local branch of the Caledon Public Library, or online for groups like Democracy Caledon, to provide information on who is responsible for what services. It is important you understand who manages roads, waste or snow removal, parks and recreation, and fire and police services. Where do your tax dollars actually go, and what level of government is actually responsible for most of what impacts your day-to-day living? It's the municipal government that makes many of the decisions directly impacting our community and that means as citizens, we have a responsibility to get to know the local issues, AND the candidates who are willing to run. Caledon might be feeling the pressures of the provincial government right now, but that's all the more reason we need strong municipal candidates who are willing to stand up for us. It also means we need good people to make informed choices at the ballot box.