

A look back at some of our top stories of 2024

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A lot happened in Caledon this year.

From political decisions to amazing fundraisers to exciting community events, there was never a dull moment. As we begin our look back the year that was, we decided to look back at some of our most interesting and impactful stories.

January

Caledon marks its 50th anniversary

The coming of 2024 marked the Town of Caledon's 50th anniversary.

The milestone was celebrated at a number of events throughout the year, such as Caledon Day and Culture Days.

Mayor Annette Groves said Caledon's 50th anniversary is a momentous occasion for every resident, business and community member that's contributed to the growth and vibrancy of Caledon.

February

Reese's Rink officially opens to the public

A Caledon teen that left an indelible mark on our community was immortalized with the opening of an outdoor ice rink bearing his name.

On February 17, hundreds of people gathered outside the Caledon East Community Complex to celebrate the grand opening of Reese's Rink, a new outdoor ice rink dedicated to the memory of Reese Meyer.

Meyer was a beloved Caledon resident and hockey player who sadly passed away from a cancerous brain tumour at the age of 14.

Meyer's dad Glenn, mom Jen, and sister Avalon, were joined by Caledon Mayor Annette Groves, Caledon Council, and Dufferin-Caledon MP Kyle Seebach at the grand opening ceremony.

Among the crowd at the ceremony were members of Meyer's Caledon Hawks hockey team and their families, and tremendous support from the Caledon community at large.

Glenn said Meyer would have loved to have an outdoor rink in Caledon East. He said there's nothing more welcoming to a parent who's lost a child than to hear their name spoken.

?Knowing that others think of him as we do, hearing of this rink's popularity already and hearing his name spoken in relation to it? I can say it's like music to us? it's the most beautiful song we've ever heard,? said Glenn. ?His legacy is an important lesson and reminder about unconditional love, loving yourself so that you can love others, (and) caring for your family and friends, teammates, and community. Learn to win and lose with grace, courage and strength while being humble. Don't sweat the little things, be present every day, appreciate the good, be kind and set goals. Have fun, laugh, make memories??

A special video message from NHL superstar Connor McDavid was played at the ceremony.

"I just want to send my deepest and most sincere condolences. I'm tremendously honoured to be asked to share a few words on the big occasion," said McDavid. "I congratulate the Town of Caledon on the completion of Reese's Rink, what an accomplishment! I hope it brings peace, joy and love to the community in Reese's honour. What a great way to celebrate such a warrior like he was and keep his memory alive."

Coldest Night of the Year walk raises more than \$92,000 for Caledon Community Services

An annual charity walk raised a significant sum for a local charity.

On February 24, Caledon Community Services (CCS) hosted its annual Coldest Night of the Year (CNOY) walk. The walk's goal is to raise money for CCS programs and services that help people who are in need of food and/or shelter.

CCS CEO Geraldine Aguiar thanked all of the sponsors, walkers, and volunteers that participated in the event. She said there were 258-plus walkers, 40 teams, and 76 volunteers at the event.

Over \$92,000 was raised from this year's CNOY walk.

March

Town prepares to distribute \$62,000 in Climate Action Fund grants

Caledon Council approved disbursement of \$62,085.85 in Town of Caledon Climate Action Fund grants, to be split among 11 recipients, at its March 5 General Committee meeting.

The Climate Action Fund provides grants to eligible applicants who want to undertake environmental projects in Caledon that align with Caledon's "Resilient Caledon Community Climate Change Action Plan."

An example of one of the recipients is Ontario Streams. Ontario Streams received \$8,000 for restoration and enhancement of stream habitats in Caledon. It did this by planting native trees and shrubs, cleaning up litter, removing invasive species, and coordinating Atlantic Salmon releases. It engaged community groups and schools in its work.

Ontario Vocal Jazz/Contemporary Festival held at Mayfield Secondary School

On March 21 and 22, the Ontario Vocal Jazz/Contemporary Festival was held at Mayfield Secondary School. It featured student vocal groups from over 25 different schools, and at the festival students got to perform in a professional environment and learn in workshops with professional vocalists.

Jennifer Moon, a music teacher at Mayfield Secondary School, helped run the festival, in which several vocal groups from Mayfield Secondary School performed. For example, Mayfield showcased a 200-voice choir, an 80-voice gospel choir, and performance from the Magnetics, a vocal group from a music class Moon teaches.

Moon said hosting the festival is a way that Mayfield can give back to the greater music community. She said the workshops held at the festival are a great way for music students to learn about music and the music industry.

One of the best parts of hosting the festival is seeing students get inspired, said Moon. To any students thinking of getting involved in music, Moon said it's an amazing experience. She said students get to explore so many different genres of music in school and can become very well-rounded musicians.

August

Caledon shares illegal land use struggles with Province

On August 13, Mayor Annette Groves, Ward 3 Councillor Doug Maskell, Ward 5 Councillor Tony Rosa, and Caledon's Commissioner of Community and Human services Catherine McLean presented to the Province's Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy on the issue of illegal land use.

The Committee was meeting at the Whitchurch-Stouffville Museum and Community Centre that day for public hearings on a study related to land use for unlicensed event venues.

Groves said there's a lot of illegal land use in Caledon and that while it's not a new problem, there's certainly been an increase in the amount of illegal land use in recent years.

"We've got some great people, but we also have a lot of bad actors, and we've seen an increase in the number of bad actors popping up in different areas? it's very disruptive to our residents," said Groves.

McLean said the two main types of illegal land use in Caledon are illegal event centres and illegal trucking yards. She said the two types of illegal land use create similar negative impacts like long-term environmental and infrastructure damage, risks to public safety, and disruption to residential communities.

McLean said Caledon residents are dealing with massive illegal truck yards operating 24/7. She said people are dealing with traffic safety issues caused by these truck yards, and that Caledon's roads themselves ? in areas not designed to support large volumes of truck traffic ? are becoming damaged.

"They're full of deep potholes and grooves, another safety hazard," she said.

Illegal event centres are causing residents to lose sleep, said McLean, as many event centres have loud music playing all night and even have fireworks shooting off.

"Despite our efforts, illegal truck depots are expanding with defiance? many operators consider legal fees and municipal fines a cost of doing business, and they're finding ways to circumvent violation notices by converting property ownership to delay prosecution," said McLean. "Just last week, I was reviewing a file that we're moving ahead with in the courts. The file dates back to 2007 ? 17 years. One of (our) officers' affidavits was 514 pages in length: 514 pages of notes, pictures, complaints, orders to comply, more pictures, more complaints ? it just goes on and on."

McLean said the business in question has not been deterred by numerous prosecutions and has even grown over the years.

"This perception of impunity for illegal land use has important consequences. People who depend on us see this and believe we're not doing enough, and they're not wrong. Current municipal powers under Provincial law are not adequate to address this issue, so our ask of you today is that you add illegal parking and storage of commercial vehicles to the scope of your study, going beyond unlicensed event venues," said McLean. "We ask that you consider amending the Planning Act and Municipal Act to strengthen municipal enforcement powers, including enabling municipalities to physically bar entry to properties; increase maximum penalty amounts for individuals and corporations; and include all charges, orders, notices, prohibitions, injunctions and imposed fines on the title of a property. We need to do more together. Our residents are counting on us."

Bethell Hospice and Hospice Dufferin join forces

On August 14, Bethell Hospice and Hospice Dufferin announced Hospice Dufferin's services will be hosted under the Bethell Hospice banner as of October 1.

Working with Ontario Health on the next steps, the integration of services will include a seamless transition of care for all current Hospice Dufferin clients to the well-established services at Bethell Hospice, read a media release from Bethell Hospice Senior Manager of Marketing and Communications Kelly Stronach. This change will allow for a more cohesive care delivery model across the Dufferin/Caledon community, ultimately improving client care for those who require palliative and community care services in the area.

Hospice Dufferin Executive Director Maureen Riedler said Hospice Dufferin and Bethell Hospice are united by shared values and a common vision.

We are confident that our integration of services with Bethell Hospice will enhance the quality of palliative care services in our region, said Riedler. Hospice Dufferin proudly celebrates a 40-year legacy of delivering exceptional palliative and bereavement care. This milestone is a testament to the unwavering dedication of our volunteers, staff, and donors.

Bethell Hospice Executive Director Margaret Paan said Bethell Hospice is honoured to provide palliative care services for the Dufferin community.

We look forward to partnering with the existing volunteers and donors to ensure critical hospice services and community programs continue to be available close to home, said Paan.

September

Community celebrates two years of the Caledon school vegetable garden project

On September 26, a large group gathered at Ellwood Memorial Public School to celebrate two years of the Caledon school vegetable garden project.

There were students, teachers, principals, school board staff, trustees, politicians, community partners and more at the celebration.

Students from Ellwood Memorial Public School prepared an amazing presentation to share with attendees. They shared a land acknowledgement, read poetry, talked about how their garden worked, and shared thanks to the earth and the people who made the garden project possible.

The Caledon school vegetable garden project was started two years ago by Caledon's Peel District School Board (PDSB) trustee Stan Cameron. The vision was to have a vegetable garden at every public school in Caledon, and that vision has now been realized.

Across Caledon, the gardens have engaged students in curriculum-based learning and brought school communities together with a common goal of learning about gardening together and managing a successful vegetable garden.

Many local businesses, like garden centres and hardware stores, have contributed supplies to the project. Countless volunteers have contributed countless hours maintaining the gardens. PDSB staff have gone above and beyond to help keep the gardens in great shape. It was thanks to these reasons and more that Cameron wanted to have a celebration to thank everyone involved.

November

Residents protest Province's Bill 212

On November 22, around 60 people rallied outside Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones' office in Orangeville to voice their opposition to the legislation and the highway it paves the way for.

Sharon Sommerville, a member of citizens' group Headwaters Stops the 413, helped organize the protest. She said she was quite happy with the number of people who came out, especially considering the poor weather. Sommerville also was pleased with the amount of cars and trucks passing by the protest that honked in support of it.

"I think it speaks to broad support," said Sommerville.

Bill 212 is the Reducing Gridlock, Saving You Time Act, and includes the Building Highways Faster and Highway 413 acts.

Among other things, Bill 212 exempts Highway 413 from the Environmental Assessment Act and removes certain rights of landowners whose properties would be expropriated to build the highway — such as their ability to apply for an adjustment to the day their property would be expropriated.

Sommerville said at the protest, attendees talked about how unneeded the 413 is and how there's better options, like opening the 407 toll-free to transport trucks. Attendees also talked about keeping pressure on the Province, and advocating to the Federal Government to designate the 413 project for a full environmental impact assessment.

"We are still pressuring the government, doing public education, getting people to sign our petition and giving out lawn signs — we gave out about 30 signs at the event," said Sommerville. "There might yet be a Charter challenge to Bill 212 because it does really breach citizens' rights — there are really serious issues with government overreach for Bill 212."

Sommerville said the 413 is a corridor for big box stores, truck depots, warehousing, and housing developments. She said it will not meaningfully reduce congestion.

"It's not going to do the job the Province is telling us it's going to," she said.

Caledon Mayor Annette Groves recently sent a letter to the Province voicing Caledon Council's opposition to "significant elements" of Bill 212.

"More than 45 per cent of Highway 413's length spans Caledon. Residents with properties in the 413's Focused Analysis Area have ostensibly had their land uses frozen since the project's initiation in 2007. Family farms could not expand knowing they would never recover their capital investments before expropriation. Several homeowners could not sell due to market rate suppression due to speculation of future expropriations," wrote Groves. "Now, Bill 212's expedited timelines to take possession of residents' lands needed for this priority highway will leave those residents vulnerable and potentially unhoused. Resident rights during the construction of Highway 413 must be upheld."