

## A love letter to Caledon

OUR READERS WRITE

**By Gloria Maxx**

Edited by Zachary Roman

Recently, entrepreneur and mental health advocate Gloria Maxx reached out to The Citizen and explained she wanted to write a thank you to Caledon; specifically to outgoing Mayor Allan Thompson. This is her letter.

Thank you Caledon Mayor Allan Thompson and Anne Thompson, the forward-thinking Town Council, Sandra Sharpe and her fabulous team, and most recently, Headwaters Arts for being creative, inclusive, and courageous.

On paper, I am a failed serial entrepreneur with a mental health journey that briefly touched upon actual homelessness. The community spirit, human empathy, and support I found in Caledon the last eight years helped me not just survive, but thrive and succeed as I continue my story of Pain and Triumph: the Lived Experience Journey.

This was the title of my first ever submitted piece of art that was accepted into (and sold) at the Fall Festival Art Show at Headwaters Arts!

My social-entrepreneurial journey began in 2015 with Heart Esteem, a global initiative to prevent and overcome childhood obesity with creativity.

My global five-year HeartEsteem journey brought me to Caledon via Airbnb, and I fell in love with the community. I walked into the Mayor's office and met with Sandra Sharpe, who believed in HeartEsteem and introduced me to Mayor Thompson, who had so much kindness, empathy, and a passion for inclusion.

Childhood obesity was something I suffered from, yet honestly, it was more mental health ? but at the time, I was too afraid to admit that because I knew from past experience that stigma was debilitating to overcome.

My ultimate dream was for April 10 to one day be deemed ?Heart Esteem Day? by the United Nations, so I asked Mayor Thomson if I could start that journey in Caledon by having HeartEsteem Day proclaimed in Caledon.

He told me I would need to address Council, and I did ? and the warmth and love of that question period resulted in April of 2016 being proclaimed Heart Esteem Month and April 10 being Heart Esteem Day! I remember Anne Thompson coming to the Council session to cheer me on. I was so grateful.

The ?Draw Your Heart? fundraising app's mission to have one million people draw their hearts for HeartEsteem was almost complete. All the Council came to an event in the Town Hall to draw their hearts for Heart Esteem. I still have the canvasses and hope to repurpose them into a fundraiser, hopefully benefitting Evolve.

Lastly, I need to mention Bill Rea ? in Memoriam ? who wrote the first Heart Esteem article. My entrepreneurial and artistic journeys both began in Caledon, and I hope to finally succeed where I have not before and to one day give back to Caledon!