

Bathroom Brouhaha

by SHERALYN ROMAN

Perhaps you haven't yet had the chance to visit the newest Caledon recreation centre. Perhaps 'new' is the wrong term, but certainly revamped, remodeled, expanded and enhanced are all terms that would apply.

Located in Caledon East, it's been open for several months now, mostly to wide acclaim. Only 'mostly' however, because it appears there seems to be a bit of a brouhaha brewing over bathrooms. Caledon seems to have its fair share of bathroom conundrums, what with that other issue 'the Mayor's outhouse' that was dropped in Southfields this past summer. Let's hope these ongoing bathroom concerns don't find Caledon's reputation going down the drain!

In a press release on its opening the Mayor referred to the newly expanded Caledon East facility as 'a first-class community complex,' stating too that it was part of the Town's commitment 'to providing quality recreational facilities for our community in an effort to promote active, healthy lifestyles, and locations where the community can gather for a variety of events.'

With a pool, a gymnasium, two hockey rinks and a beautiful, brand new expanded library facility, it is something to behold. That said, it would appear not everyone is happy with who might be doing the 'beholding.'

The issue in Caledon East actually has more to do with the universal change rooms than with just bathrooms. Now that the tours are over and 'the shiny new thing' is seeing regular use, there are some in Town who have a complaint about the concept of universal change rooms.

If you are not familiar with this style of facility, one that we are seeing more and more of in public spaces like major shopping malls, sports facilities and even restaurants, a universal bathroom (or as in this case changing facilities) are gender neutral change rooms for all, outfitted with private stalls with doors that lock 'creating a space for any member of the family to use, at any time.'

The practicality of the situation, for those of us who grew up in a different era, cannot be overemphasized. Dad taking daughter to swimming lessons? In the 'old days' Dad would have had to send his six-year-old daughter into the change room alone to try and get dry, dressed and ready to walk out into the winter weather, without forgetting a mitten, socks or with hair still dripping wet. A Mom with a son at that in-between age, too young to dress themselves but too old to really comfortably enter a 'female' change room 'what a dilemma! With universal spaces, all that ends now. Shopping? Worried about a child who might require support in some way, who uses a mobility device or is a neurodiverse pre-teen that requires a caregiver for their own comfort in a bathroom facility? Now that caregiver can assist them. Blended families, single parents, universal facilities have got your back! And ladies, if we're being honest, this benefits you too! How? No more long lines outside bathrooms at big events, desperately waiting your turn while looking longingly at the virtually empty men's bathroom!

To be clear, with that last comment I'm not making light of the situation, but, let's face it, there are perks to this gender-neutral bathroom/change room concept. While we thought it was 'progressive' just a few short years ago to see 'family' change rooms created in recreation facilities, they just led to longer wait times and increasing frustration as most places only had the one, and drying and dressing kids takes time. Now, everyone has a room of their own! Doors that close and lock for privacy and space for everyone with minimal, if any, wait times! Just like we once viewed family change rooms as an idea whose time had come, now we have another innovation that aims to ensure everyone has access to facilities we all need and that doesn't discriminate based on what a family looks like or who it is composed of.

So, what's all the fuss about? What's the 'brouhaha over bathrooms'? Perhaps predictably the naysayers are out in full force declaring these facilities unsafe, unnatural and in at least one example that set my blood boiling, as a haven for 'yup, you guessed it' pedophiles. Some folks have gone so far as to suggest a gender-neutral changing facility is 'grounds for child grooming,' and wondered, calling it 'disgusting' whether or not pedophiles actually played a role in the planning process. Because yeah, that's how

this works (insert sarcasm here).

After all, never before in the history of public restrooms has there been a case of voyeurism.

Never before in the history of public restrooms has there been the sad and unfortunate event of someone being followed, cornered and attacked and certainly never before, since the dawn of cellphones, has someone taken one into a wide-open, no doors or privacy, single-sexed changing facility, and tried to take photos! The very idea that only now, now that we are providing inclusive facilities, is the time that perverts will come crawling out of the slime is what's really abhorrent.

The times are changing. When we "know better, we do better." Not every family looks the same. Blended families, step-families, same-sex families, differently-abled families?the list goes on.

We are all humans and now we all have a space that accommodates us. Sure, there are creepy people in this world. They have always existed and they will continue to find ways to exploit ANY situation, anywhere and at any time. Creating gender-neutral facilities doesn't "cause," nor "create" creepy, nasty people, unless of course you consider narrow-minded, non-inclusive folks to be nasty.

Would we all feel better if every door, in every bathroom, change room and department store fitting room came as close as possible to the floor, to help ensure our privacy? Probably. But that was true long before gender-neutral facilities existed. Most of all though, could we please, PLEASE, just stop dragging up references to pedophiles and child groomers every time there's a change in the world we all don't agree with? Bathrooms or not, I'd really like to see an end to THAT kind of brouhaha.