

Caledon Firefighters fundraising for those in need through Coldest Night of the Year]

By Zachary Roman

Caledon's Fire and Emergency Services personnel are answering the call in a different way this February.

One team each of firefighters and new recruits will be participating in the Coldest Night of the Year (CNOY) fundraising walk for those who are experiencing hurt, hunger and homelessness.

Kevin Hayashi and Shannon Mullins, who are Caledon Firefighters who are leading their colleagues in fundraising for this year's walk, said the work that social service groups like CCS do in Caledon is amazing.

"An issue like homelessness might not seem as prevalent in Caledon in comparison to other communities, but we know it's there and it's the work that CCS does that will help the community," said Mullins.

Last year, Caledon Firefighters participated in the virtual CNOY walk, and organized a walk through Cheltenham in their bunker gear. Some community members joined in too, and there was great participation from that year's recruit class of firefighters.

"They really drove the rest of the Caledon Firefighters to take notice," said Mullins. "Caledon Firefighters have an important role to play when we're responding to an emergency, but we also need to be positive role models in our community and help out where we can."

Last year, Caledon Firefighters raised \$14,000, a great showing. Mullins said with over 250 firefighters in the community, they have a large network and are hoping to once again gain the support of their family, friends and colleagues.

Hayashi has worked with CCS in the past and said he knows just how important the work they do is. He said, at the core, the nature of being a volunteer firefighter is wanting to help out, and participating in CNOY is just one way he can do that.

"Taking the time to help organize the Caledon Firefighters team with Shannon, I know it's time well spent as it will make it easier for our colleagues to help out as well. I'm excited to see the event return to an in-person event," said Hayashi. "Public events offer a great opportunity to remind the community of some of our core at-home safety tips like ensuring your detectors are in working order or making an escape plan."

Mullins said Caledon is where she was born and raised and that she's very passionate about supporting people in Caledon and creating equal opportunities and access to service. She said it's important to support each other and work to eliminate homelessness in Caledon.

"We're all in this together," said Mullins.

Mullins and Hayashi both said it's been a tough couple of years and that people are now building back connections in person. They said CNOY would be a great way for a local business to team-build while helping the community.

"If you are a local individual, this is a great way of meeting members of your community and supporting those in need," they said. "We hope to see all of you joining us in this important event."

Caledon Community Services (CCS) is hosting their CNOY walk on February 25, and it will be one of many different walks being held across Canada that day. The walk begins at 4 p.m. at the Caledon East Community Complex, and there's two and five-kilometre routes for teams to choose from.

Ahead of the walk, teams do their best to fundraise and be the top team on the Caledon CNOY leaderboards, a friendly competition where those most in need of help benefit from the fundraising.

As noted in a previous Caledon Citizen article, those wanting to get involved with CNOY can create their own fundraising team or join an existing one online at cnoy.org/location/caledon.

CCS is hoping to raise \$100,000 from this year's event, and so far teams have raised over \$25,000. Those who want to donate can also do so on the same website.