

Cameron acclaimed for fourth term

By Zachary Roman

Education is a core value in the Cameron family.

Stan Cameron, Caledon's Peel District School Board (PDSB) trustee for the past 12 years, will be taking up the job for four more.

August 19 was the last day for potential candidates in Caledon's October municipal elections to register, and that date passed with only the incumbent Cameron registered for the PDSB trustee position.

While he said he hopes the reason no one challenged him was because his constituents think he's doing a good job, he said he doesn't want to be naive and that opinion can ultimately only come from their mouth, not his. Cameron said he always tries to put his strong sense of empathy to work in his position as trustee, and said he's always willing to go to bat for families in the Peel District School Board.

"I really like doing this and I believe that I'm helpful at heart as a person," said Cameron. "It works for the community, I think, to have a voice that is empathetic. I've never lost my sense of empathy for what it's like to have children in a big school system."

Cameron's own children went to school in the PDSB and are now working as educators.

Cameron himself was an educator, teaching at Centennial College for 37 years before retiring in 2018. He said he tells people he's the candidate with experience in the classroom, staff room, and board room.

The PDSB is the second-largest school board in Canada, with 257 schools under its umbrella serving nearly 156,000 students and their families.

The board's large size can be intimidating to some families, and that's where Cameron said his experience comes into play. He said he's very persuasive and can help families, especially when they feel they haven't been listened to.

"If they feel they've been hard done by or if something's been an injustice towards them, I feel like I can be that voice," said Cameron. "I really feel I win the greatest number of arguments on behalf of families who ask me to help intervene when they give me logical arguments to use. When I have a logical argument, I can help move some small mountains."

Cameron said it's important that university, college, and trades education pathways all be prioritized, and that sometimes there's an unfair push on youth to go to university.

He explained he wants each child in the school system to be successful in their own way, and that doesn't always mean by getting straight A's.

"Maybe they're learning really wonderful social skills. Maybe they're great people. Maybe they're amazing volunteers. Maybe they're incredibly helpful to other people, and they get by in school," said Cameron.

He said when he was in elementary and high school, his main focus was athletics and he just got by in academics.

Cameron said he's so thankful for all the teachers who supported him, and said you never know when someone's time to shine is going to be. After high school is when Cameron developed his deep love of education and learning, and he got a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in education.

'That's what I share with parents who are concerned their kid isn't doing particularly well at a [given] time? I mean, maybe we could help put some supports in place that will help? but maybe their time is yet to come,' said Cameron. 'So many people over these last 12 years have come back to say, 'You were right about time. He has taken off now, he's found himself,' [or] 'She's in love with learning.''

When Cameron's phone rings, and it's a number he doesn't recognize, he said his first thought is 'Someone needs help.' He said he prides himself on the fact that he returns emails and phone calls as soon as he can. Cameron explained that people need someone who will listen to them, then begin working to find a solution.

He said after 12 years as trustee, there's not a question about Peel's public education system that he can't find the answer to.

'I know all of the people, I know all of the resources, I know where to go to get those answers,' said Cameron. 'There's also a lot of advocacy in this position that goes into fighting for things that your community needs.'

An example of this advocacy is the recently-announced new public elementary school in Caledon East. Cameron said it didn't happen by the Ministry of Education saying, 'Oh, you have some new development in the school boundary, we'll give you money for a new school.' It took a long time to get the funding necessary for that school, said Cameron, and it involved a lot of connecting with the right people and preparing the right arguments and data.

Another example of his advocacy that Cameron gave is when he was given a budget proposal that suggested hiring 75 new educational assistants in the PDSB instead of the requested 100.

Cameron said he led the charge on getting the missing 25 educational assistants to be suggested in the next budget proposal by garnering support from his colleagues, arguing that they are needed now more than ever. The next proposal suggested hiring 100 educational assistants.

'It's a huge cost? which is maybe why they were a bit worried about it, but it's a cost well-utilized if we're going to help more children be successful,' said Cameron.

With a large amount of growth coming to Caledon, Cameron said it's important to have new schools being completed at the same time as new developments so kids have somewhere to go to school that's close to home.

'It only happens if we have a voice that keeps reminding the Ministry and reminds our planning staff to then remind the ministry,' said Cameron, adding it's hard for the Ministry to ignore advocacy from a trustee as they represent the electorate.

Cameron has a long history of volunteering in the Caledon community, as a coach for minor hockey, Home James driver, and Bethell Hospice resident support worker. He said it's important to give back and help others who can use some support.

'I don't do that because I want people to vote for me, I do it because it's part of who I am,' said Cameron.

Cameron said 'education changes lives?' is his favourite line. 'I fundamentally believe that,' he said. 'It changed my life.'