

CVC to run expanded Maple Syrup Festival at March break

By Tabitha Wells

This year's Maple Syrup festival at Island Lake Conservation Area is going to be bigger and longer than ever, but it's also undergoing a change of hands.

As announced late last year, Credit Valley Conservation (CVC) will be taking over the annual event following the increase in users on the trail networks and a successful festival held elsewhere.

Deborah Martin-Downs, CVC's chief administrative officer, spoke at the Dec. 10 Orangeville council meeting to provide an update on current activity levels, and update on the 2015 year and a budget request. It was during this presentation that she confirmed the news about the festival.

‘The plan for this year is that the CVC will run the festival, and we have provided an invitation to the Optimist Club to be a part of it if they wish,’ she said. ‘We think this is a an opportunity to make further use of the sugar shack there and drive up use of the park.’

The Optimist Club of Orangeville had previously run the Festival for 23 years, with the event acting as the main fundraiser for the community group, to assist in their activities throughout the year.

Deputy Mayor Warren Maycock brought up the issue of whether this decision had been made in cooperation with the Optimist Club, or whether it was decided by the CVC.

‘I have a concern regarding the Maple Syrup Festival,’ Maycock remarked. ‘The Optimist Club does a tremendous amount of things in town, and this is their major fundraiser, which allows them to do these things. Have you talked with them about this?’

According to Martin-Downs, CVC had conversations with the Optimist regarding their plans to run the festival, and they reached the current agreement together.

The Citizen followed up with the Optimist Club after the meeting, and received the following statement on behalf of the organization:

‘Regrettably, after 23 years, the Optimist Club of Orangeville will no longer be providing the Maple Syrup Festival to our community at the Island Lake Conservation Area in the spring. This is mainly due to a change in direction made by the CVC regarding their new revenue model.’

The proposed plan for the Festival includes a nine-day event over March break, which exceeds the level of support the Optimists would be able to provide.

‘Although the CVC had offered the Optimist Club a role in the new event structure, it is not possible for our small service club to provide volunteers over a nine-day event, hence we had to decline,’ the statement from the Club added. ‘We believe it would be best to focus our efforts on events and initiatives that utilize the talents of our members, as well as benefit our community in other ways.’

Removing the event from their provisions will mean looking for other means to fund their annual community projects, such as Christmas in the Park, held at Kay Cee Gardens.

‘The Maple Syrup Festival was our largest fundraiser, similar to the Million Dollar Hole in One and Fantasy Auction Evening we have had in the past,’ said Harry Bell, past-president of the Club via email. ‘I’d rather not put a dollar value on this event. Suffice to say that it does leave a significant gap for us to cover in the overall scheme of things, based on the size of our club and the community events we fund and support.’

He added the club had fortunately built up enough in their reserves this year to get by, but beyond one year it would ‘definitely impact’ their capability to sustain the programs they are currently supporting.

‘We are in the process of determining what our next big event will be to replace the (festival),’ Bell said. ‘This is something we are engaging all of our members in to let everyone be part of this and bring forth their ideas. Hopefully, it will be something unique and different for the town to entice some new excitement in the community.’

While this chapter in the Optimists' events has come to an end, the club remains thankful to the community for their support and participation in the festival.

‘The Optimist Club of Orangeville would like to acknowledge our sincere thanks to all members of the community ? including the Town of Orangeville, residents, out-of-town guests, volunteers and sponsors ? for supporting us over all those years,’ concluded the official statement from the club. ‘We remain dedicated to serving the youth of our community and we have exciting plans to provide new events that will be revealed in the coming months.’