

Group marking five years of engaging SouthFields residents

As of this month, the SouthFields Village Residents Group (SFVRG) officially turns five.

This grass roots and volunteer-run organization, administered by local Caledon residents, is reporting that their social media site, events and regular meetings continue to achieve high turnout and involvement from area residents.

‘We always strive to maintain our original mission statement of fostering and promoting regular communications between Caledon residents and local government and other stakeholders,’ stated SFVRG founder Kenneth Bokor. ‘We are very pleased with the response from the community as we have grown over these five years.’

SFVRG takes its origins from other city-run groups, like Brampton's Citizens Advisory Committees (CAC) or ratepayers' associations.

‘Years ago, many municipalities founded and funded these types of groups for the primary reason of effectively communicating with local residents within the various wards,’ Bokor commented. ‘With some municipalities, every ward had a CAC and worked closely with its City and Regional councilors.’

‘I helped to start up and successfully run for many years a group for Ward 2 in Brampton and wanted to take this same approach to the new community that I was moving into in early 2010, what is now known as SouthFields Village,’ he added. ‘Realizing that Caledon is made up of a community of communities, I saw other residents' associations already active in many areas in Caledon, so starting something in SouthFields seemed like the right thing to do.’

‘With the help of Yevgenia Casale in 2010, we formed the Village of SouthFields Residents Association,’ he stated. ‘We both saw the opportunity to create an organization that would embody a voice for residents in a brand new Greenfield community.’

Both local Ward 2 councilors and Caledon's Mayor immediately supported the group. Their very first meeting was well attended and attendance has grown over the years. In an effort to promote further community engagement, the team started to organize and host local events, such as the SouthFields Village Community Day, which went on annually until 2014 and the yearly Clean-Up Day.

Their meetings spread to a quarterly basis and they now regularly get more than 125 in attendance.

Casale departed the association a couple of years later and the name was then changed to the SouthFields Village Residents' Group. Additional local residents were added to the team in order to continue to grow and all members were involved in a pure volunteer capacity.

‘As I look back over these past five years, I am very proud of the achievements we have been able to garner,’ Bokor said. ‘These achievements include assisting in creating and maintaining a sense of community pride and ownership, keeping residents informed of what's happening within and around our village and building solid relationships with our local government officials, town staff, developers and other stakeholders.’

The SouthFields Village Residents' Group has also been able to make additional impacts within the community. Bokor, on behalf of the community, wrote in to the Peel District School Board to make a case for the school to be renamed after the village, rather than the street it is located on. The residents' group also worked with EcoCaledon for installation of waste bins along Kennedy Road and the Town for pet litterbag receptacles in the green spaces. They worked with the developers on maintaining key intersection road markings and the Town on installing the only stop sign beacon light at a heavily travelled intersection to enhance public safety. The group is also part of a three-year partnership with Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) in delivering stewardship programs to area residents.

Recently, the residents' group was successful in leading a year and a half battle against Hydro One for improper billing of density rate classification charges for SouthFields Village and Anthem developments. Hydro One will be issuing retroactive credits to affected customers next month. Bokor was also able to get a special allowance to have Hydro One conduct another rate audit before the next scheduled timeframe, in order to move area density rates to the best and lowest cost level sooner. Additionally, the group voiced resident opposition to the Town regarding the Monarch Plastics development application and are currently working with Town planners on detailed risk mitigations to the submitted site plan application.

‘With our work ethic of being respectful, courteous and professional in our dealings with residents, officials and everyone, we have and continue to operate in a manner that gets things done and keeps our voice heard,’ Bokor stated.

At the last public meeting in March, Bokor announced his intent to step down from the group at the end of June.

‘Again, I am very proud of what we have been able to do and achieve over these past five years,’ he said. ‘It's time for me to move on and we've got a great team in place to continue to build on the solid foundation myself and past team members have laid. With the leadership of Eddie Garland, I am confident the SouthFields Village Residents' Group will continue to be an effective entity within the community. We've got a very active Facebook site with over 700 followers that represent engaged residents and the

Group hopes to move forward in achieving non-profit status later this year?.

The next meeting of the SouthFields Village Residents' Group will be June 10 at 7 p.m. at SouthFields Village Public School. In addition to the regular agenda of development updates and other information, cake will be served to recognize the five-year anniversary of the group.

For more information on the Group, check out their Facebook site at www.facebook.com/southfieldsvillageresidentsgroup/