

Home James looking for volunteers to get folks home safe

By Bill Rea

A lot of people got home safe during last year's holiday season after celebrating, and there will be more this year, thanks to Home James.

Home James is a service that consists of teams of three offering to get people and their vehicles home if they have perhaps had a bit too much to drink while celebrating.

Stan Janes, president of the local Home James chapter, said things are coming together for this year's program. He said service clubs and the local car dealers are on deck with their support, and sponsorship is coming along well. He added the aim this year is to make the program self-sufficient.

What they need is volunteers to make the service a success

Volunteers are always the secret of the whole thing, no matter what, Janes said.

Diane Tolstoy, vice-president of operations for the program, said they are making a push to let people know about the opportunity. She said they have had a loyal core of volunteers. We need to get more new blood, she commented.

They are especially looking to get younger people involved. This service does require some late nights, and there are some people who don't function very well at 2 a.m.

Janes said people who use the service will come out and volunteer, trying to return the favour. It's also a fact that people taking part in Home James have fun doing it.

It's not just saving lives and keeping drunks off the road, Tolstoy observed, pointing out the volunteers have a good time. It's a feel-good situation.

It's an adrenaline rush, she added. We're working as a team. There's the feel-good feeling; the feeling that we're accomplishing something.

There's also a lot of word-of-mouth when it comes to attracting volunteers. Janes said there were two students from the emergency dispatch program at Humber College who have helped out in the past, and they have been spreading the word to their classmates. He observed something like this gives them the chance to put some of what they have learned to practical use.

The program runs out of the former Legion hall in Bolton, making use of several computers to organize things.

This is not an amateur operation, Tolstoy declared. This is well equipped.

She added they have developed software that is unique to Home James.

Last year, operating from the Legion hall, Home James responded to 360 calls for rides, getting 822 passengers to their destinations safely. There were 145 volunteers who put in a total of more than 3,000 hours. Janes said it's not unusual to have a volunteer come in for one night, then return for two or three after that.

As they came in and experienced, they signed up for more, he commented.

The service is delivered by teams of three; one person drives the shuttle vehicle, another drive's the client's vehicle and the third person is a navigator.

Janes said the variety of cars volunteers get to drive makes for some good stories. He said the cars can vary from a 1972 Chevy to a brand new Mercedes or Porsche. Tolstoy said a lot of the volunteers brag about the kinds of cars they get to drive.

This is a perfect location for what we do, Tolstoy added, pointing out it's centralized, convenient to the local roads, with lots of parking. This feels like home to volunteers.

Another advantage is Baffo's Pizza and Pasta and Tim Hortons are both nearby.

Baffo's is our food guy and Tim Hortons is our coffee guy, Tolstoy said. That's what keeps the volunteers engaged.

They are also grateful for the support they received from the local Navy League.

The program will be seeking volunteers, age 19 and older, to take part. Janes said they have to be at least 19 because they might have to go into a licenced establishment to meet the clients.

He added they have to register in advance, just so they know how many will be on hand.

The program will have its official launch will be Nov. 7 from 6 to 9 p.m. at the Legion hall on Ann Street.

The service will be available Friday and Saturday nights, starting Nov. 22 and running until Dec. 28, and it will be available New Year's Eve, which is a Tuesday this year.

For more information, go to www.homejames-caledon.ca