

HomeJames in Caledon gets off to enthusiastic start

By Bill Rea

If last Thursday's launch was any indication, there's going to be a lot of enthusiastic support for this year's HomeJames program in Caledon.

A large crowd was out to start the program, which is aimed at delivering drivers and their cars home if they have possibly had too much to drink during holiday festivities.

"It's been a busy year," declared HomeJames Caledon Chairman Tayler Parnaby.

He reflected on a recent story in the news about a small town where officials were becoming alarmed at the number of seniors being brought into the hospital, largely because there was no other place for them to go. Local paramedics addressed the situation by visiting them, checking their blood pressure, etc. The number of hospital visits was cut in half.

"It demonstrates what happens when a community comes together to deal with a specific problem," he observed.

Parnaby also stressed there has not been a fatal on Caledon roads nights the program has been operating, and he called that an "extraordinary accomplishment."

A number of dignitaries were on hand to help launch this year's effort.

Dufferin-Caledon MP David Tilson was not in that group, being tied up with work in Ottawa. But Parnaby commented that "David is high in his praise of this organization," even making an address in the House of Commons recognizing the effort.

"I very much believe in what you are doing," Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones commented. "I trust that your winning streak will continue."

Jones also pointed out the streak can't continue without a lot of volunteer help. "It really does make a difference," she said.

Mayor Marolyn Morrison was also appreciative of the all the volunteer support.

She said she tells mayors of other municipalities of the uniqueness of Caledon, and the number of volunteers per-capita here. She praised the volunteer efforts for making the program work.

"It's not easy staying up that late when you get older," she observed. "You make such a difference in the community."

"It's not all about arresting bad guys," commented Inspector Dom Beckett, interim commander of Caledon OPP, as he commented on the number of impaired drivers who have been found this year in town.

"This program is fantastic," he said. "It gives people options."

"You have no idea how much work is required," Parnaby told the audience.

Stan Janes, president of the local HomeJames chapter, said he came up with the idea when he realized there was only limited public transit in Caledon, meaning people who might have had too much to drink were rather short on options.

"We needed to create an alternative," he said.

Janes added they have been able to draw support from various groups in town, including the local car dealerships, which help by furnishing shuttle vehicles, as well the local service clubs.

"They all grabbed the same bar," he said. "They all made it happen."

The volunteers on hand for last week's event were also issued new T-shirts with the HomeJames logo on it, and Janes urged everyone to spread the word about the program.

"You have a brand to show off to people," he declared. "You've got a logo to talk about."

Although the name of the program has been changed, this will be the fifth year the effort to get people and their cars home safe has been operating.

Diane Tolstoy, vice-president of operations for the program, observed that since 2009, the program has provided 1,254 rides, getting 2,753 people home safe. It's involved tens of thousands of volunteer hours, and driving some 37,000 kilometres.

"In all of that, we've had zero fatalities," she said. "That is our aim and goal ? to keep it at zero."



Members of the Royal Canadian Sea Cadets (Crescent) Amber Coupland, Karolina Drozd, Carly Turrell, Joseph Whalen and Pete Drozd were at the front of the picture at the official launch last Thursday of the HomeJames program. Also on hand were HomeJames Caledon Chairman Tayler Parnaby; Inspector Dom Beckett, interim commander of Caledon OPP; Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones; Councillor Patti Foley; Mayor Marolyn Morrison; Diane Tolstoy, vice-president of operations for the program; and Stan Janes, president of the local HomeJames chapter. Photo by Bill Rea