

HomeJames was a big success over the holidays

By Bill Rea

The recent holiday season was a busy time in a lot of respects, and that includes for those who run the HomeJames service.

Last Thursday night was a time to thank the many volunteers who helped make the service work.

HomeJames is a service that helps people, their vehicles and their passengers get home safe if they've had too much to drink during holiday celebrating. Teams of volunteers are dispatched to the client's location. The team usually consists of a designated driver to drive the client's vehicle, a person to drive the shuttle vehicle and a navigator to also handle communications.

HomeJames Caledon Chairman Tayler Parnaby announced last week there were 189 people who volunteered for at least one shift during the 14 evenings that the service was operating over the holidays. And there were several people who put in extra shifts, both over the holidays and other occasions during the year when it was available. Simon Lem put in 18 shifts, Marg Jones put in 17, Jason Hunter was out 14 evenings, Jay Turrell did 12, David Borgal and Willis Coulter did 11 each and Al Squires and Harold Janes each did 10.

The combined efforts of the volunteers saw 461 calls responded to, with another 1,128 passengers safely getting to their destinations. The trips covered a little more than 13,700 kilometres. The service is free, but clients often offer donations, and Parnaby said they amounted to \$11,597.65.

"This night is all about you," he told the volunteers gathered last week at the Royal Ambassador Event Centre, as he congratulated them on an "extraordinary year."

"It's been, quite frankly, a hell of a year," Parnaby observed, pointing out the former chair Stan Janes stepped down early in 2015. There has also been a lot of re-organization in the way the program works, conducting a detailed analysis of as many rides as possible.

"We know what we're dealing with," he said, adding they redefined the service area, and new computer procedures have let organizers determine what sort of demand there will be for a given night, and how many volunteers are going to be needed. Parnaby said they had been expecting about 100 calls New Year's Eve, and received 96.

"We set a record," he added.

"This does not happen without volunteers," commented Caledon OPP Inspector Tim Melanson, who pointed out that during those 14 evenings over the holidays, the detachment did not have to deal with any accidents involving fatalities or serious injuries. "You got the people home safe and sound."

"We want Caledon to be in the forefront of being a safe community," Deputy Fire Chief Mark Wallace added.

Mayor Allan Thompson, who's put in shifts for the program, said he was out New Year's Eve too.

He also said he had been discussing what he was going to be doing with a woman in a bank, and tears ran down her face.

"Thank you for doing that," Thompson said she told him. "My kid brother was killed at 17 by a drunk driver."

"That is the message," he added.



Tayler Parnaby was flanked by the HomeJames mascot as he reviewed the statistics the program compiled over the holidays.



Caledon OPP Inspector Tim Melanson and Deputy Fire Chief Mark Wallace both commented on how HomeJames help keeps the local roads safe.



There were a number of draw prizes available last Thursday. Marg Jones was accompanied by her son Jackson 6, as she accepted their 55-inch Samsung TV from Mayor Allan Thompson and the HomeJames mascot.