

Just Ask ? Don't Judge

by SHERALYN ROMAN

Sometimes all you need to do is ask a question or two. But do we? Nope. That age old beast called 'assumption' rears its ugly head and conclusions are jumped to time after time after time. The results can be devastating. Reputations are ruined in the blink of an eye, businesses are left scrambling to defend themselves against baseless accusations or friendships are fractured, often irreparably. Often, these outcomes could have been avoided altogether just by asking a simple question or two.

I'm not sure what part of human nature it is that leads some of us to lean towards giving others the benefit of the doubt while others immediately assume we're all up to no good. It's only gotten worse throughout this pandemic, a time when, frankly, for the good of our own and everyone's personal welfare, we must rely on each other. We hope that enough of us will get vaccinated to create herd immunity to get out of this nightmare and we hope that enough of us will support our community in meaningful ways that ultimately result in the greater good. We need each other now more than ever before and yet what sometimes happens is the exact opposite. We're assuming, we're reporting on others and we're hiding behind the 'safety' of a keyboard to launch a thousand bitter words.

Caledon is in the midst of a Support Local campaign in an effort to help ensure our local small business owners survive this pandemic. We're doing this because it's the right thing to do and because 'and this is important - these are the people that, in turn, support Caledon! They sponsor our sports teams, they help raise money and/or provide direct donations to many of our local non-profit agencies and they devote significant time and energy to volunteering here in town. Perhaps that why, when I recently read of yet another local small business being reported to the OPP by a 'concerned' community member, I reacted with frustration and reached out to talk with them about what happened.

This time, the business impacted was Caledon Roots. While the store is relatively new to the Bolton community, and in fact first opened its doors during the pandemic, the owner is a true blue Boltonite, born and raised here and now raising her own family here. In addition to their regular business they are currently offering Friday night funnel cakes during these warm, summer-like days. They've been met with an enthusiastic response and owner Sarah was quick to tell me that she is 'so appreciative of the incredibly supportive customers' they have. It's this enthusiasm however, that has led to some long, socially distanced, line-ups and it appears it was this that recently attracted the ire of a community member who called and reported the store to the OPP. Instead of wondering what all the excitement was about, or stopping to ask a question or two, the police were called. On a Friday night - when it's entirely possible the OPP had about a million other more important calls to attend.

The responding officer reviewed the situation briefly, discovering quite quickly that all the appropriate permits were in place, that ALL appropriate COVID protocols were being followed, masks were being worn and that in fact, as an essential service (Caledon Roots is an all locally grown in Ontario food purveyor) the store was operating within pandemic guidelines and departed accordingly.

Sarah shared that, 'my customers do their part,' and were wearing masks and that, like me, she just wishes people wouldn't always judge first and ask questions later. As we spoke, it was this final comment that really resonated: 'My heart is in this town, we all really just need to be kind to one another. We're almost at the finishing line and we can get there together.' She's right. I wrote about this some time ago, believing as I do that we are losing sight of those times when we rallied together, rallied for our front line workers and rallied behind our local businesses. Why 'when we are so close to sufficient vaccination rates to potentially reopen everything ' does it seem that we have lost sight of this bigger, kinder picture?

I wish to be 100% transparent readers. This may have hit home harder because I currently sit on the Board of the Caledon Parent Child Centre and we are just one of the agencies who recently experienced the kindness of Caledon Roots. They ran a Mother's Day Fundraiser, donating a \$1.00 from every 'Cinnamom' sold, to the CPCC. This is only one of the many ways that Sarah supports community, as she also sits on the Board of Trade and is Chair of the BCC. I wonder if the caller thought about any of this before reporting them to the OPP. I wonder if that same individual has ever driven by the long line-ups outside any of the larger retailers

(who have been allowed to remain open this entire pandemic) and reported that to the OPP?

I know the police have a job to do and I think we all understand that. What I don't understand however, is why there continues to be a double standard between small and large retailers. What's worse is that while our provincial government has perpetuated this double standard throughout the pandemic, making it almost impossible to do business, it now appears that some in our own community are too. Please, as Sarah said, let's just keep being kind to one another. We're inching closer to the finish line folks. Support local, shop local and eat local. We rely on our small businesses for so many community related endeavours but right now, they are relying on us. Don't judge, just ask.