

Kin Club honoured for exceptional work in challenging times

By Rob Paul

On Saturday, concerned residents in communities surrounding the proposed routes of Highway 413 and the Bradford Bypass gathered to raise awareness about the negative impacts the highways will have on the communities and the environment.

The day of action, organized by Environmental Defence, leaned on the rallying cry of 'Greenbelt NOT Asphalt' to continue to pressure the Government of Ontario to cancel the highways for the sake of protecting the Greenbelt.

Although Premier Doug Ford just recently doubled down at an announcement in Caledon on the Province's desire to move forward with the highways and invest billions of dollars, the day of action had been planned for weeks.

Environmental Defence has been a leading voice in the fight against the highways, citing the unnecessary costs, environmental damage, and lack of long-term fix as reasons to doubt the highways will change anything.

If built, Highway 413 would run from the Highway 401/407 interchange in Halton to Highway 400 in Vaughan. The highway would pave over farms, forests, wetlands and 400 acres of the Greenbelt and cost Ontario taxpayers upwards of \$6 to \$10 billion. Highway 413 would also add over 17 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, at a time when cutting emissions is more urgent than ever, stated Environmental Defence.

Due to the club's growth, Kin Canada honoured the club with the most prestigious award a Kin Club can receive as the Kin Club of Bolton won the Ken Pierce Membership Growth Award.

On behalf of Kin Canada, we would like to congratulate you on winning the Ken Pierce Membership Growth Award, wrote Jennifer Burry, Kin Canada National President, to the Kin Club of Bolton. We realize that this award was a difficult one to obtain this year because of the unforeseen pandemic, but your club managed to stay on top. Thank you for continuing to believe in our association. Without dedicated clubs like yourselves we literally wouldn't exist.

Kin Club of Bolton Executive Howard J. Phee credits the efforts of membership co-chair's Leslie Caldwell and Andréé-Ann Rousseau in growing the club when many others found themselves in a hole due to the circumstances of the last year and a half.

There are 420 clubs in Canada and to receive the Ken Pierce Membership Growth Award for the largest growth in Canada is a very prestigious award, said Phee. We didn't even know we were going to receive it; they didn't tell us in advance, and it was just [awarded] to us. The National Board of Directors of Canada for our association looked at what Leslie and Andréé-Ann had been doing for the last year and a half and as it turned out we grew. During COVID, most clubs lost members and some even closed, and we had grown to 36 members from 28 during the pandemic. We are now the largest Kin Club in Ontario.

To not only sustain their current membership but grow throughout the pandemic was no simple task and the Kin Club of Bolton kept everything running thanks to the focus they put on keeping members engaged and giving the club a family feel.

It wasn't easy, Phee said. During the pandemic, we've continued to have virtual calls with our members and communicating during the pandemic was critical. It was difficult and it took more work, but we've been able to keep people together.

We tried to build it as not a club that we're just all giving time to, but if you needed somebody at 2 in the morning, there are names on the list who you know you could call for them to be there for you, said Caldwell. I tried to keep it so that we are friends and that when you come together, you're happy to be together as we're doing good for the community. You feel good about working with like-minded people, but it's also a friendly environment and people are excited to see each other.

?On the video calls it was more difficult, but we tried to make it more interesting and played some online games and continued to keep the emotional connection going. It's easy to drop-off when you don't see people?churches and schools found that. You really have to make that emotional connection so that people want to be on the call.?

The driving force behind why the Kin Club of Bolton continued to work as hard, if not harder, despite limitations this year, was that the member knew there were so many people in the community relying on them.

?We knew we had to keep the money rolling to make sure all the projects we support would continue to run smoothly,? Phee said. ?We support kids who have cystic fibrosis every year by making a large donation to the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, we donate to a scholarship fund where students locally are selected, the boy scouts, we run a Christmas gift exchange at the King Nursing Home, bingo at Vera Davis Community Centre, Meals on Wheels; we always donate to Bethel House, and the list goes on. We're also a major supporter of Meaghan's Music Room and we've donated substantial money to keep the program going the last three or four years. It's a music program for young adults with physical and mental challenges.?

?A lot of the time that's their biggest outing, they don't get to go on a bus to play with the football team or things like that,? Caldwell said. ?For them to have this music program is so important. There are children there who can't speak, but it's absolutely amazing how musical they are and it comes out in different ways and they're so proud of themselves. We're so proud to be a part of developing those talents in those children.?

The Bolton Kin Club donates to over 20 national and local charities every year, which takes a substantial budget and one of their main fundraisers is the toonie sales they run and even though they couldn't hold them for most of COVID, they continued to do what they could to hit the ground running when things opened up again.

?At Zehrs, there are clothing collection bins, and we manage those on a daily basis. We take the clothing from there to our clubhouse and we sort the clothing, and we have toonie sales (not during COVID) and it's any item for \$2. We have those essentially every two months at the Presidents Building. It's quite a chore but it's how we raise the money to continue to support the charities that we have in our budget.

?The pandemic didn't stop us from collecting clothes, we continued to collect and sort the clothes and put them aside throughout the pandemic. Last month, we had our first three toonie sales with COVID protocols in place.?

A problem the club has run in to in recent months though with the toonie sales is people throwing garbage (everything from mattresses to drywall) into the bins and the Kin Club of Bolton is pleading for people to stop and understand what those bins are for.

?Unfortunately, people have also been dumping garbage in our clothing bins,? Phee said. ?It's become a garbage dump when it's supposed to be clothes for the needy and it's making our work much harder. People have not been kind to it and we need all the money that we can raise to continue to support charities.?

With everything going on throughout the pandemic, the Kin Club of Bolton could have easily taken a step back until things began to return to normal, but they knew the situation would only put more people in need of their fundraising and it motivated them to continue to work hard for the community they love.

?I really believe it's our love of people and love of community,? said Caldwell. ?We are very proud of how much volunteer hours we give per week and per month to give back to our community. With the toonie sale, every item is \$2, from wedding dresses to Lululemon pants to anything that's put in that bin. There's a lot of families that cannot afford to send their kids to school in Aéropostale or things like that and the joy of seeing the parents come in and knowing their kids will go to school and be proud of the clothes they're wearing, and they got it for \$2. That motivates you and keeps you going.

?We work with CCAC (Home and Community Care Support Services) when there's families in need and we give them a specific card for them to use and come. We support those families where they can shop if there's been a fire in their home or if there's

mothers who have left with just the clothes on their back for their children. We do a lot of behind-the-scenes support and the CCAC knows who to get a hold of within our club and we will furnish them, look after them, and do anything to help people and community.?

The Bolton Kin Club is now in the process of getting ready to launch their Santa Claus drive-by parade for Saturday, December 4. It's one of the biggest ways they give back to the community each year and although it's looked different during the pandemic, they're excited to be able to give residents a little bit of normalcy this holiday season.

?People come to us now and they always want to know if we're still going to be running the Santa Claus parade in some way,? Phee said.

?I think sometimes people don't realize it takes thousands of dollars to put a parade on,? Caldwell said. ?We have to raise major funds for it because there's over 20,000 people who come out to the Bolton Parade and they count on it for their kids and Santa's there every year. We were devastated last year we weren't able to get the permit for the road closures due to COVID with people standing too close and so we did a drive-by last year where the parents just have to come to the end of their driveway with their kids and we have a route where we go throughout all of Bolton. We had Santa come to you, so you don't have to come to Santa, and it allowed us to keep the social distancing. We're doing it again that way this year and it's a huge initiative that we give to the Town?I couldn't imagine Bolton without a Santa Claus parade.?

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For more information about the Kin Club of Bolton, their upcoming toonie sales, the Santa Claus Parade, or to become a member, visit www.boltonkin.com.