

Kudos to Caledon

by SHERALYN ROMAN

It's been a week of mostly good news from the front lines of the battle against COVID-19 and one could almost hear the collective sign of relief (and perhaps even a few whoops of joy) when the news of the slightly earlier reopening of patios was announced. It is, after all, patio season so to be able to actually leave our homes, head outdoors and enjoy a great meal and a beverage is long overdue. Given the short notice, however, and the fact that our poor personal services friends are STILL nowhere near opening, I predict a few of your friends might look a little different from the last time you saw them, please be kind! More importantly however, is the fact that so many of us can now go out and get our 'second job' and for most of us, that's the best news of all. Thanks to the Caledon East Community Centre vaccination clinic for once again rising to the occasion.

On the first day appointments were available for certain eligible groups, I had reason to be at the Caledon vaccination clinic twice. The fact that neither visit resulted in a vaccine dose for me was ok because two of the people I love most in the world needed it more and were able to get an appointment thanks to the computer prowess of the teenager in our house and having multiple browsers open on multiple devices! The results were appointments mid afternoon and later evening and a chance to see firsthand how the Caledon team was doing at delivering doses. Given the challenges faced on the first day of opening, kudos to the team for doing a great job.

Our first visit was a little more chaotic but we survived.

In the intense heat of the day, the line-up stretched beyond the borders of the building, around the back and was moving quite slowly. The multiple staff and volunteers we spoke to shared that the response to the online booking portal reopening was overwhelming. Visits based on registrations projected at a reasonable and manageable number suddenly skyrocketed to well over 1,000!

Despite the challenge this presented and what may have appeared frustrating to some, staff and volunteers wandered up and down the line offering water bottles to those who needed it, pre-screening folks and doing their best to ensure everyone was as comfortable as possible under the circumstances.

Inside was the same story.

We were directed every step along the way, by polite, smiling faces despite the significant degree of heat inside the building as well. Most of us felt some relief coming in from the outside, but once there and still standing (as a 'caregiver' on both occasions I think I stood for about 4 ½ hours that day!) you began to realize it was pretty hot inside too. The nurses and clinic staff and volunteers all had on masks and face shields (obviously) and for each new injection were donning and doffing gloves that are hard to pull on even in ideal conditions. Perhaps some of you already work in these kinds of conditions but I was impressed that everyone was still so pleasant despite the heat, the challenges and the unexpected crowds.

The evening visit went a little smoother.

The line-up still stretched beyond the back of the building, in fact it was actually a little longer than in the afternoon but it was also moving a little faster. As I stood in line this time, I noticed first the cheerful voice and face of one of the same individuals I had seen earlier in the day, still walking up and down the line with a case of water, still joking and laughing with people and stopping to answer their questions. I had returned home, enjoyed some quiet time in the AC while I quickly had a bite to eat and travelled back again ? but she was still there in all that heat and still pleasant! Inside we asked for a wheelchair to make the wait more comfortable and someone was quickly dispatched to find one. I could complain that one wasn't found but some WERE available. They were simply already in use and frankly, probably by folks who needed them more than we did. Thanks to a lovely lady right behind us in line however, a seat was found and she helped us again a few minutes later too ? thank you kind lady, it was appreciated!

As I stood alongside the ?patient,? I had a chance to watch the same team of nurses, staff, security and volunteers who had been there all day working in the stifling heat, still provide great service with a smile. You can tell when people are smiling, even behind the mask. I watched as the poor nurse who came to us, struggled to put on her gloves in the sticky heat. While I'm not good at math, at 20 chairs per row and an average ?time in the chair? of about 20 minutes per person you can imagine the turnover and how many times she had already taken those gloves on and off throughout the day and yet she still happily joked with us about it.

In the end, what struck me most is that while we have no doubt all been thinking about our health care workers throughout this crisis, chances are in our minds eye we focus on the critical ICU teams, the nurses and doctors in the emergency room and those caring for COVID-19 patients in hospital wards. What we may not think about is the many other teams of people who are doing their best, day in and day out, to aid in the fight. There are so many other nurses and doctors and paramedics and health care workers who are working at clinics like this one across the country, sometimes in the stifling heat like we experienced and for long, tiring shifts.

Locally, this team of health care workers are supported by Caledon town staff and management personnel, most of whom have likely never worked in this kind of environment before. These are town staff and management who have risen to the occasion and embraced a role they had no prep or training for and if you ask me, are doing a pretty darn good job under the circumstances. Kudos Caledon!