

Mayor Thompson reflects on the highlights and challenges of 2021

By Rob Paul

Despite another year defined by the COVID-19 pandemic, Mayor Allan Thompson says he is proud of what his Council was able to achieve for the Town of Caledon in 2021.

As the year comes to an end, Thompson spoke with the Caledon Citizen about some of the highlights of 2021, the challenges, and what he and Council are focused on for 2022.

"I've got to say that we wouldn't have been able to get what we did done without the commitment of Council," he said. "I've got an awesome Council that has done a terrific job, and everyone rolled up their sleeves. Again, in another COVID year and it looks like we'll be entering 2022 the same way, and we've just got to constantly pivot, but through that, we pretty much honoured and delivered everything that we wanted to on the budget."

Though the pandemic has been tough, and he says the impacts and effects of it continue to draw on municipal resources, he says he is thrilled over the resilience of the community with Peel Region going from a hotspot in Canada to a model of effective and efficient vaccine distribution and uptake.

Thompson pointed towards several accomplishments for the Town over the last year, including securing the land for a future Caledon GO Station, launching Have Your Say platform to increase public engagement, and launching a rebrand tourism website (visitcaledon.ca). But being able to keep the Town engaged and connect through different avenues has been the most important achievement in his eyes.

OPACC has helped over 1,000 families in Ontario and currently supports over 120 in the Region of Peel alone, but fundraising support is imperative for it to function at its highest level.

To help raise funds to support childhood cancer families, OPACC has released a new 2022 wall calendar.

The calendar contains each child's photo and story (submitted by their parents), as well as a childhood cancer awareness fact each month. The calendar also includes two Caledon children: Ava (Ewing Sarcoma, a cancer of the bone or soft tissue) and Eric (neuroblastoma, cancer that develops in nerve cells).

"A few months ago, OPACC posted about their yearly calendar and so I submitted Ava's story and she was chosen to be part of the calendar," said Nancy Margetts, Ava's mother. "Part of the reason I wanted to do it was because last year around this time, there was a story in the Caledon Citizen about the support from the community for Ava. This was a way for us to, number one, help OPACC raise money and awareness for their charity because there are so many charities out there, but not one specifically for the parents like OPACC?it's not even so much the financial, it's the overall support. Then, also because we're a part of the community and not many people have followed her story since last year, this was a nice way to do a follow up for her in the calendar. We've shared the story to our Facebook page and Instagram so people who have been following her story got to see she would be in the calendar as well."

When Nancy and her family found out about Ava's diagnosis, they were in uncharted territories that made them feel alone, but when OPACC came into the picture, it changed everything for them.

"Ava was diagnosed with Ewing Sarcoma a year ago this week, so it was fairly recently," she said. "She went through chemo and radiation and finished in August, but right from the beginning, other mothers who had children who had gone through the same type of treatment had mentioned OPACC. Even though we never met them in person, and still haven't because of COVID, they actually left us packages at the hospital?binders with all kinds of information and little gifts for Ava?and they've offered so much support."

?They've offered support through one-on-one conversations and weekly drop-ins where parents can log onto a Zoom call on Tuesdays and ask questions and meet other parents to see what other people are going through. That helped us a lot, especially at the beginning with COVID because we weren't able to interact with other parents in the hospital or anything.?

Given the circumstances surrounding COVID throughout Ava's battle, it made it very difficult for Nancy and her family to connect with other people going through similar things, but when they found OPACC they were finally able to reach out and here from others who have gone through similar situations.

?With COVID it was extremely important to have OPACC to lean on,? she said. ?You feel extremely isolated those first few weeks after a diagnosis. You feel like you're the only one in the world going through what you go through and it's very isolating. These other parents?because there are parents on there who aren't necessarily on the committee, but they do sign up for Zoom calls?offer support, guidance, and answer any questions no matter how small and take the time to give you whatever you need.

?In the beginning when we thought we had nobody to turn to other than our doctors and our team, they were there for us. Karen (Szukaloa, Parent Liaison) reached out so quickly once I had sent in my letter telling them our situation and she always made herself available as well as the other members of the organization. On the Zoom calls they all gave their opinions and helped connect us with other families who either had the same type of diagnosis or were at the same stage of treatment so we could ask those questions.?

The constant support from OPACC truly made a difference for Nancy as Ava went through 14 rounds of chemo and 35 rounds of proton radiation, and they continue to be there for the family whenever they need it.

?I can't speak to what it was like before COVID, but to my understanding they were in the hospital all the time supporting parents, but they've been there for us at any time virtually,? she said. ?We can Zoom or message them whenever we need them and it is important because we see the big charities?Sick Kids, the Canadian Cancer Society?and those help support funding for cancer, but there's nothing in terms of the actual mental support that parents need. It's especially important because we have to be our children's support and so much is put into adult cancers, but so much impacts children's cancer?the parents, families, friends?and being able to connect to people who know exactly what you feel makes a world of difference. It's made a massive impact on my life and having them answer the questions I had or having situations that didn't feel normal to me at the time, knowing other parents had gone through them gave me such relief. Everything helps when you're going through something like that.?

Nancy says she hopes that more families who feel alone in their child's battle with cancer can learn about OPACC and reach out to get what they need during trying times and can feel the community behind them as they push forward.

?I didn't know they were there until someone mentioned it to me,? she said. ?And now, they're a godsend to me. There's not a lot geared towards child cancer and there's not a lot of other places that support the parents and families as much as OPACC does. They've done so much for us.?

Calendars can be purchased at www.opacc.org/shop for \$15 each (\$10 each for orders of three or more). All proceeds of sales go towards supporting the charity's free programs and services for childhood cancer families in Ontario, including in-hospital support through its Parent Liaison program, community-based childhood cancer parent support groups throughout Ontario, hospital parking reimbursements, distribution of gift cards for gas and food, and advocacy on issues of importance to childhood cancer families.