

Plenty of rain barrels are up for auction

By Bill Rea

Rain barrels have been available for auction in Caledon over the last couple of years, and that tradition will be continuing. Students from several of the schools around town have been busy decorating their barrels in an effort to drive home the message of water conservation. The barrels were on display at Town Hall last Tuesday so Caledon councillors could get a good look at them before their meeting.

"I must say the rain barrels are beautiful," Mayor Marolyn Morrison told the audience.

This is the fourth year that Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) has partnered with ecoCaledon at this time of year to promote water conservation in town.

In a letter to the Town, Cameron Richardson, stewardship coordinator in the Humber River Watershed with TRCA, stated this is done through Paint a Picture for Water Conservation, Caledon's annual rain barrel art collection and conservation campaign.

He added schools around the community were asked to paint barrels and work on water conservation plans. As well, artists in the community were invited to apply their creativity to a barrel to add to the collection. The barrels will be displayed around the community, with the public having the chance to bid on them. The auction will conclude at the Caledon Day festivities June 14.

The idea behind the barrels is to use them to capture rain water to be used for gardening needs, etc.

John MacRae, vice-chair of education for ecoCaledon, told councillors the goals of the program includes promoting the use of these barrels by families at home, as well as promoting conservation and educating the public about the reuse of rain water at home. He stressed that over time, the education process involves teaching everyone, not just youngsters.

MacRae said the plan now is to have the barrels displayed at local events and locations, and the auction will be online.

The program has been facilitated by a three-year grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation. The funding, MacRae said, is going toward in-class workshops on water conservation, expanding community outreach through such events as Caledon Day and the local farmers' markets, etc.

He also said social media has been useful in spreading the word, and there have been a number of sponsors. In addition to ecoCaledon, TRCA, Peel Region and the Town, he said support has come from Coca-Cola. MacRae said a team of employees from the company spent a Saturday retro-fitting the barrels. As well, Home Depot sponsored gift cards to help buy the paint and Greer's Auto Collision sealed the barrels.

Decorated barrels have come from Mayfield and Robert F. Hall Catholic Secondary Schools, as well as Alloa, Ellwood Memorial, Caledon Central, Holy Family, SouthFields Village and St. John the Baptist School. MacRae said they are hoping to have more schools taking part next year.

Council heard reports on what's been going on at some of the schools from students who spoke.

Activities at Ellwood Memorial Public School in Bolton have included a Learning Garden, using a barrel to catch rain, "so we can use the water that has already been given to us," one student said. The Learning Garden sees Grade 4 and 5 students working after school.

Another student from Alloa said they plan to use a barrel to supply water for pumpkin seeds the kindergarten students will be planting in the spring.

Morrison told the students she successfully bid on one of the barrels last year, and it's in the backyard of her home.

"Thank you, all of you, for a wonderful job," she said. "Keep up the pressure on us and keep doing a wonderful job."

"There's a lot of character and work that's gone into them," MacRae agreed.

Councillor Gord McClure said he'd be bidding on the barrel from Alloa, because his grandchildren go there.

"Councillor McClure, bid often, bid high," Morrison told him.

Councillor Rob Mezzapelli was appreciative of the work the students have been doing.

"It's the fact that you guys understand what's going on," he told them. "The fact that you guys get it as well as you do inspires us."



Students from various Caledon schools, as well as local artists, were showing off their rain barrel creations for admiring Caledon councillors last week.