

Recreation department happy to return to in-person programming after pivoting to virtual

By Rob Paul

The pandemic has forced everyone to make changes and most to pivot to a different way of doing things. As Ontario seemingly returns to some semblance of normal, there are more and more chances for in-person interactions.

The Town of Caledon opened recreation facilities July 23 and pools July 26 as part of the Province's Step Three in the Roadmap to Reopening. Now as Caledon and Ontario reopen, summer programming is beginning.

Prior to Step Three, everything the Town was offering had been virtual. Making that switch from in-person to online brought some difficulty initially, but the Town wanted to ensure they could still support those in need of programming while stuck at home.

"It has been a difficult time for many of our municipal partners," said a spokesperson for the Town's recreation department. "Here in Caledon, we did the best we could to maintain some programs and activities, virtual and at-home, because fitness and health is important. For example, arts and crafts, family paint nights and baking programs. Outdoor fitness and general interest programs were also (and still are) available. We continue to offer virtual programs such as leadership programs for youth and virtual camps."

Making the adjustment to virtual programming was harder for many reasons, but in particular the lack of being able to build relationships through the online avenue was tough.

"Establishing personal connection with our residents is important, even more so during the closure," they said. "We knew that some of our planned activities would have to be revised throughout the pandemic. So, with that, we used technology to provide a sense of community and offer programs and activities for the entire family."

Although it wasn't an ideal situation shifting to the online world, there have been some positive outcomes with virtual programming and that's why the Town will continue to offer programs online.

"What started off as a challenge became an opportunity to provide virtual programming to residents, in the comfort of their own home," they said. "This added a sense of safety, convenience and stress relief for our community members, all of whom were and many who still are maintaining physical distance."

With the return of in-person programming comes more adjustments "not a return back to how things used to be, but to how they must be to run safely given the new normal brought on by the pandemic. The Town's recreation department is prepared to ensure safety for all as they rev up for the summer.

"The best experience is still in-person and that is why we're happy to be open and we encourage our residents pay us a visit," they said. "We will continue to promote and follow all safety protocols to keep our staff and residents safe."

As of right now residents can reserve their spot for in-person visits to fitness centres at Southfields Community Centre and Caledon Centre for Recreation and Wellness, swimming pools at those facilities, book the ice pad at Mayfield Recreation Complex, and sign up for summer camps in various facilities.

For more information on the summer programming being offered (both in-person and virtually) by the Town, visit bit.ly/3i6V0sC.