

Special ceremony at ODSS to welcome 35 new citizens

By Mike Pickford

Orangeville District Secondary School (ODSS) is bringing a 'once in a lifetime' event to the community today (Thursday) in the form of a special citizenship ceremony for 35 new Canadians.

More than 12 months in the making, the ceremony will take place in the school cafeteria, starting at 10 a.m. More than 600 students from ODSS will be on hand to watch as the group of new residents take their oath and get sworn in as brand new Canadian citizens. Janine Grin, head of directions at ODSS, noted the local school wanted to do something special to commemorate Canada's 150th birthday and couldn't think of a better way than to embrace the country's extensive history when it comes to immigration.

'For me, this ceremony is all about giving our kids the opportunity to see the diversity in this country and to celebrate that diversity,' Grin said. 'Immigration is one of the largest foundations of our country today. This is an amazing opportunity for not only our students, but our staff and the greater community in general to get together and honour and celebrate with our country's newest citizens.'

This is the first time such an event has taken place at ODSS. Grin noted that Dufferin-Caledon MP David Tilson will be on hand to offer his congratulations to the new citizens, while Director of Education Dr. Martha Rogers will bring greetings on behalf of the Upper Grand District School Board. Glenn Drinkwater, a member of the Order of Canada, will lead the presentation.

The event itself is co-hosted by the Royal Canadian Legion in Orangeville and has been organized by Grin and 23-student in her business leadership class. The group has organized a 30-minute program to run prior to the ceremony. The school's jazz band will play at 10 a.m. before a student song and video montage takes over at 10:25 a.m. At 10:30 a.m. the Legion's Colour Guard will enter alongside the dignitaries in attendance.

Following the ceremony, the new citizens will be led into a rendition of O Canada.

Leading up to the big day, Grin and her students reached out to several immigrants currently living in the Orangeville area to hear about their personal path to citizenship. One local, Christine Adams, has lived in Canada since she was nine. Moving north from California with her family several years ago, Adams recalled what it was like to receive her citizenship.

'I remember the ceremony quite well,' she said. 'It was a group ceremony, not an individual one like I expected. It was really fun and I met a diverse group of people and we all sang O Canada at the end. I'll never forget it.'

Now, several years after she received Canadian citizenship, Adams owns and operates Global Pet Foods on Broadway in Orangeville. 'I'm very proud to be Canadian,' she added.

When asked what she was looking forward to most, Grin said the happiness and excitement of those standing on the stage, living their special moment. Although, she also believes it's going to be an invaluable learning experience for all the students watching on. 'It's going to be a really special moment. It's not every day that you get to witness such a big moment in somebody's life,' Grin said. 'This is the first time we've ever done something like this at ODSS. I feel it's going to be a great way to share with students what our country is all about and its makeup. It's going to really showcase how diverse our communities can be.'