

Stars Align

by SHERALYN ROMAN

Recently, I had the opportunity to witness the rare alignment of government agencies actually working together for the good of our community. Some of the folks present that day, and who know me to occasionally be cantankerous, wondered if, as a result, I might write a 'good news' story to reflect what I was witnessing. I agreed that I probably would and now that you're here, I promise in what's likely to be a once-in-a-lifetime event, to write positively about not just one but two political decisions I happen to agree with! I know, I know. I'm not sure what's going on, either. I'm no astrologer but perhaps all the stars have briefly aligned.

The first piece of good news, which you may have read about elsewhere in this paper, is that the Caledon Public Library was the recipient of both federal and provincial funding in support of the re-imagining of the Margaret Dunn Valleywood Library. April 29 saw members of the Dunn family, MPP Sylvia Jones and representatives from the federal Ministry of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, gather together with Caledon councillors; past and present library board members and the community, to celebrate the true potential of all that libraries can be. They aren't just about books anymore!

Libraries are (and always have been) about access. They are the great 'equalizer', in my opinion, providing a place for anyone to get what they need to succeed - all free of charge. These days, that means libraries that aren't just about access to books but also: to computers, emerging technologies, a chance to learn a new skill, a place that still offers a home to the unemployed to conduct a job search or for students to use the wifi after school to do homework and so much more. In other words, libraries are pretty darn important.

Now, thanks to these recent federal and provincial partnerships, a library that was originally championed by former Mayor Thompson and one where I took my first child in 1998, is now a vibrant, technology (and book) filled community space that represents all that is good about the future. In a bittersweet, full-circle moment for me, (as a mom and former CPL Board member and volunteer) seeing what this library means for a new generation of patrons, I watched with pride as that 1998 kid covered the opening for this very paper!

Speaking of pride, my second kudos - considerably more shocking than praising the government collaboration noted above - goes to Stephen Lecce. Yes, THAT Stephen Lecce, the Minister of Education.

I doubt very much he cares how I feel but if one is quick to cast aspersions then one must be just as quick to praise when occasions demand it. Minister Lecce recently announced that he 'supports raising the rainbow flag at publicly-funded schools as an indication of inclusion to LGBTQ students.'

While this is a definite 'YAY' moment - it's still unfortunate that he would not take the extra step of actually directing 'boards to do so during Pride month in June, leaving the decision to parents and local communities.' That doesn't bode well for marginalized community members in York Region Catholic schools whose parent community is vocally (and shamefully) anti flag, but it was an important recognition that raising the Pride flag sends a 'signal of respect and inclusion' and represents 'support for actions (schools) can take to create inclusive, safe places.'

Do I wish that Minister Lecce had gone further? Absolutely. Do I believe that part of the reason he made the statements in the first place was to very publicly remind parents who send their children to Catholic schools that these boards are publicly-funded? You bet!

While Minister Lecce acknowledged the mental health challenges and higher suicide rates faced by some LGBTQ students, he stopped short of forcing the catholic school boards hand. Still, I see his not-so-subtle reminder as a challenge to Catholic school boards to remember to behave a little bit more like the man upon whom the religion was founded - you know - tolerant and accepting.

Sadly, as the results of last fall's municipal elections can attest to, not only York Region but right here in Caledon, being 'tolerant' and 'accepting' towards the 2SLGBTQ community is not what won the popular vote. But I digress, back to the 'I'm being positive' part - regardless of his motivations, whether as a subtle reminder or in the true spirit of encouraging tolerance, at least he took a public position on the subject. It's a start.

The stars might not align again for some time. I would make the most of finding myself in this 'jolly' frame of mind because not long after the Pride flag announcements Minister Lecce went straight back to talking negatively about negotiations and discussing the implementation of yet more new curriculum that more or less expects teachers to do even more, with even less. But that's for another day?in the meantime, libraries - YAY! Pride flags - YAY!