

The forgotten ones

by SHERALYN ROMAN

Recent events have served as a vivid reminder of the strange times we continue to find ourselves in. While for many, self-isolation has turned into either a forced 'vacation' of sorts or a work from home opportunity but at your own pace and schedule, there are a number of others who are quite literally 'burning the candle at both ends' trying to keep social service agencies alive, provide support for battered women or help folks in a myriad of other ways either personally, professionally or through charitable acts. These are the forgotten ones. When we all go out on to our porches and clap or light up our cell phones in celebration of front line workers (and well we should) there is an entire subgroup out there continuing to help keep our economy going that we are excluding. It's time to thank the forgotten ones.

I must start by saying that if I, even in this attempt to ensure everyone is included, accidentally exclude someone, please know that it's not because we aren't thinking of you. I am conscious every day that there is so much good in our world and trying to rise above the temptation to focus on the bad. Troubling news out of the US and their rush to open the floodgates to boost the economy and people who continue to complain that our own government isn't doing enough are a distraction - a pretty big one at that. Instead, let's give a shout out today to those folks who are working diligently behind the scenes in every way possible to continue to provide services to our community and to the world at large.

First, to our farmers. If we refer to good old Maslow and his Hierarchy of Needs, at the very bottom of the pillar and supporting us in every other way, is the need for food security and safety. Never an easy job at the best of times, farmers are facing the usual challenges of weather, prices for product, the stock market and more, coupled with lack of employees making tending the crops and livestock a challenge and market/trade competition that in some cases has resulted in the dumping of milk or the ploughing under of crops like asparagus because there's no one to harvest it.

Locally, across the country, and around the world, farmers are being hit hard and need to be remembered as we express gratitude for the folks who are trying desperately to keep this economy going in the midst of a pandemic.

At the same time, our local agencies such as The Exchange and the Orangeville Food Bank are doing their very best to keep local folks fed. They rely on an army of volunteers and donations and are working under strict new guidelines for keeping their staff, volunteers and clients safe and this in turn is presenting operational challenges. Yet they continue.

Caledon Meals on Wheels is providing new services to seniors in our community under strict safety protocols, helping to ensure they too have access to regular grocery deliveries because without food and food security - what have we really got?

Maslow identified the second level of his hierarchy as safety needs. We are all craving safety at this time. Things like having employment, our health and access to resources. In these challenging times there remains the obvious thanks to the front line workers who continue to support communities like ours. But think too about the folks behind the mask at our public health units, the personal support workers who continue to do home visits not knowing if they are going into harms way. Our municipal employees who continue to provide services like garbage and recycling pick up. Workers who are repairing hydro lines, installing internet networks or repairing potholes. What would happen if suddenly this ground to a halt? Perhaps it's never crossed your mind but it wouldn't be good. Our local politicians who have found new and innovative ways to support the community through virtual town halls, meetings online and linking those in the community who can help with those that need help. Strapping on a mask and leading by example - these are folks who are just like you and I, possibly afraid of contact with the virus, but still out serving the community trying to ensure we have access to resources supporting our health, our safety and our security.

I don't think we have the time, or the ability to cover all five stages of Maslow's hierarchy. After all, it ends in self-actualization and I'm sure you'll agree we have a whole lot more to worry about right now than whether we're feeling we've achieved our full potential or are 'the best that we can be.' Instead, let's focus on the third stage of the pyramid, love and belonging. Here is another

opportunity to thank folks not typically thought of as 'front-line' but who are very much serving in that role, albeit in a different capacity. Think of a non-profit agency that is near and dear to your heart. Know that the Executive Directors of these agencies are working diligently behind the scenes to keep their agencies afloat. They are exploring and/or offering new and innovative ways of serving their clients while also balancing reduced staffing levels, new safety protocols and facing significant challenges to their funding bottom line. For many, this opportunity to provide a sense of belonging for us all, of creating special family times and a chance to make friendships amongst their clients and within our community is truly a passion and they are facing significant struggles to keep these agencies working in this difficult time. For everyone working in these fields ? know that you are truly valued and appreciated.

As I said at the outset, I know there are more folks out there who deserve our thanks. There are accountants trying desperately to help their clients manage their new reality and learn about how to access support programs that might help them right now. There are the civil servants who are supporting folks as they apply for available programs. Bank employees who are actually facilitating some of the business loan opportunities announced by our Prime Minister but facilitated through your local bank manager and staff. The list goes on and if you aren't mentioned here, again, please know that your efforts are appreciated. This is my thanks, to the forgotten ones.