

Too many demands on Cheltenham Day organizers

The following open letter to Caledon council was submitted to the Citizen for publication.

Cheltenham Day has been a fantastic event in our community for the past 20 years.

The Cheltenham Area Residents Association (CARA) is proud of the positive benefits it has added to the community and to the Town of Caledon. Through the funds raised by CARA and the Cheltenham Day Committee, a great deal of value has been brought to the community and as a result, the Town.

In the Charles Haines Park alone, CARA and the Cheltenham Day Committee raised more than 50 per cent of the funds to build the pavilion and, with the assistance of a strong volunteer group, built 100 per cent of it. This alone is an astounding achievement. In addition, CARA built and provided 100 per cent of the financing for the information sign, including lighting and a large flower container to surround it. CARA involvement was instrumental in insuring there was a community room included in the design plan for the expanded Cheltenham Fire Hall. In addition, when the expansion of the fire hall meant the playground equipment would be removed, CARA again provided the impetus and 50 per cent of the funds to install new equipment. Cheltenham Day funds financed 50 per cent of the original play equipment and the park benches at Beryl Bland Park and CARA was instrumental in naming and dedicating the park which before then was little more than a vacant lot. Over the years, CARA has used its fundraising efforts to beautify the village with hanging flower baskets in the summer and Christmas wreaths in the winter and for the very popular Light Up The Night wagon rides during the Christmas season.

Countless volunteer hours have been given to achieve this impressive contribution to our community and Caledon. However, in the last few years we have noticed an overwhelming increase in the administrative, insurance and permit process requirements that the Town of Caledon expects.

Our Cheltenham Day Committee has one volunteer to complete all of the administrative paperwork. Over the last few years, ever more detailed information about the events of the day are required in order to qualify for the Town's insurance coverage. It now takes our volunteer more than 40 hours to cover all the administrative work for Cheltenham Day! To date, the list of departments we are required to communicate with at the Town includes Parks and Recreation (seven items), Administration (one item), Public Works (two items), Legal (two items), OPP (one item) and the Fire Department.

Our major concerns are with the Town's Insurance and Special Occasion Permit Holder Agreement requirements, which have become so daunting that CARA is no longer able to attract vendors and in some cases volunteers to participate in the day. CARA carries its own insurance and the Town has traditionally provided insurance which covers the events of the day. Now, however, the Town is requesting that CARA sign an Indemnification and Hold Harmless Agreement in order to absolve itself from any insurable responsibility for the day. The Town also requires street vendors to provide Proof of Insurance (naming the Town as the Insured) to sell their products. Since these vendors are traditionally hobbyists, this new insurance requirement deters this group from participating as the cost and paperwork outweigh any benefit. Over the last three years, we have seen the participation of our vendors drop from 29 to six. Even the caterer is required to provide an insurance certificate.

The laws and requirements for obtaining a Special Occasion Permit are set out by the Province of Ontario through the Liquor Control Board of Ontario, and these have always been followed to the letter. Our servers are all Smart Serve certified, OPP paid duty officers are hired and the required fencing put in place. However, in the last two years, the Town has required an additional form be completed by the LCBO permit holder called the Special Occasion Permit Holder Agreement. This is very disturbing, as the intent and spirit of this form indicates that the Town is attempting to transfer all responsibility to the person named in the Special Occasion Permit Holder Agreement and this has discouraged volunteers from managing that segment of Cheltenham Day. From road closure, vendors, dinner and bar, it appears that most of our administration work now is focused on mitigating the Town's insurable responsibility for a sanctioned community fundraising event.

With so much community effort going into our parks and the community, we find it disheartening that the Town demonstrates such a lack of appreciation for the efforts of our volunteers. Our past achievements and future potential appear to be of little value to the Town. This attitude was driven home when the removal of the playground equipment at Beryl Bland Park two years ago was done with no consultation with the community, even though the community playground committee raised 50 per cent of the original funds.

The Town of Caledon promotes itself as a family-friendly, community-oriented place to live and puts great emphasis on the uniqueness of its villages, and yet we, as a fully-volunteer community group, find it increasingly difficult to host an event like Cheltenham Day.

We feel that the administrative procedures and processes; i.e. the detailed event information, the ever-increasing list of contacts, the

ever-expanding insurance requirements for vendors, caterer and permit holder and last, but not least, the Special Occasion Permit Holder Agreement have placed an undue burden on our volunteers and significantly altered the spirit of the day.

Cheltenham Day is run by volunteers, who give a great deal of their time to the community, but the requirements set out by the Town to run the day are becoming so onerous that there is a strong possibility that Cheltenham Day will cease to exist. Without some significant compromises and concessions from the Town, we fear this will be the outcome.

It is imperative that we have an open dialogue with the Town to try and resolve the issues put forth in this letter.

CARA and the Cheltenham Day committee,