

# Verify, verify, verify

by SHERALYN ROMAN

As someone employed by, and a big believer in, print media and the importance of facts, it may seem counterintuitive to talk about social media today. However, with the exponential rise in misinformation, 'viral' videos and a plethora of so-called 'social media influencers' changing the way we consume news and information, I'd argue that more than ever before, print media is critical for providing in-depth analysis of local, national and international events. Moreover, we all bear a responsibility as consumers of information to verify, verify, verify.

Consider this your gentle nudge to look further into something that is happening locally and that might already, or should be, on your radar.

Social media is NOT your friend. Perhaps many of you already know this, but periodically even I go deep down 'the rabbit hole.' Although I remain sceptical of everything I read, it's still all too easy to get caught or confused about what's real and what's just a 'reel' meant to grab our attention but which offers nothing of value.

Just two recent examples include discounting initial reports out of Mexico that Canadians were sheltering in place during a prolonged period of violence, while at the same time almost falling for the purported news that the men's hockey team had spontaneously broken into a rendition of our national anthem after the Olympic medal ceremony on Sunday.

For the record, they did not. It did happen, but it was over a year ago during the Four Nations Cup in 2025. What's any of this got to do with Caledon?

There's a new Facebook group in town purporting to be a resident-led site sharing news about Caledon, for Caledon. When I say 'new,' I mean the page is fairly new, but the people behind it not so much. Not that I want to direct traffic to it, but the questionable site is called 'Building Caledon Together.' It should not be confused with another site known as 'A Better Caledon,' nor with a third Facebook page called 'Democracy Caledon.' That's because these latter two pages are indeed resident-led while 'Building Caledon Together' is apparently not.

In 2022, a local Caledon resident started the page 'A Better Caledon' with the intent of providing a 'report card' of sorts on municipal politics, 'holding elected officials accountable,' by tracking their voting records on key issues. It also shares information on issues that are coming before Caledon Council for consideration. 'Democracy Caledon' was also founded by local residents, in this case a non-profit volunteer group whose mission is 'to champion an open, democratic, public-inclusive process for municipal decision making' and, as part of what they do, also shares information and updates, often with an environmental lens, on what is coming before council.

Alternatively, 'Building Caledon Together,' as recently reported by Canada's National Observer (itself an online news source) bills itself as a 'A citizen-led group sharing local updates, highlighting community initiatives, and encouraging informed discussion about Caledon's growth.' The issue? According to CNO, and some concerned area residents who initially flagged the page, it is apparently NOT a citizen-led initiative, but rather, a page that appears to have been created by a digital marketing firm owned by a political strategist based out of Kitchener, ON, and whose past client list includes several Dufferin Caledon politicians.

I'm not suggesting anything here other than a general 'reader beware' reminder. It applies to all social media pages. Social media is sometimes 'easy,' with information readily (and literally) available at your fingertips. But is it good information? Is it reliable? Who is producing the content you are consuming?

When it comes to how you are sourcing information it's incumbent upon all of us to become more responsible consumers. It might take a few extra minutes, but if you are looking to verify news, the credibility of sources and/or to fact check something, it's

relatively easy to do so.

Ironically, many of the tools and resources are available online, but that ease of use is all the more reason to actually utilize them for fact-checking purposes.

Of course, trusting your local newspaper, and local investigative journalists who often both live, and work, in the community, to provide verified, well-researched and non-bias reporting is even more important. They are well-educated professionals who are guided by, and operate within, a framework of ethical standards, and who are responsible for ensuring accuracy and accountability in reporting.

If you are also looking online however, just remember this. It is an election year and ? I would argue ? a pivotal one in terms of its importance to Caledon's future.

Reader beware of what you find online. Making sure you are armed with factual, reliable information from verified sources, and (shameless plug) relying on your local newspaper, is the only way to ensure your vote not only counts, but matters - because it was based on an informed decision, not paid social media influencers.