

Volunteering helps to grow caring, connected communities together

Written By CONSTANCE SCRAFIELD

Tuesday (Oct. 1) marked the celebration of the International Day of Older Persons (IDOP), the day designated in 1990 by the United Nations General Assembly, acknowledging that the older adult generation was the most rapidly growing demographic.

The statistic is that there are 700 million adults over 60 years of age in the world, which number will increase to 1.4 billion by 2050.

So, this week on the IDOP, Oct. 1, seniors from all over Caledon were invited to attend a presentation and to talk about the two most important aspects that these statistics reveal, namely, to draw attention to the needs and challenges of older adults and, even more importantly, to acknowledge the essential contribution the majority of older men and women can continue to make to the functioning of the society.

Tammy Elliott addressed those assembled. She had introduced herself as having lived in Caledon for 20 years and, as a moth and a grandmother, she said, "I'm very blessed... to be working part for Volunteer MBC, where we help place volunteers in meaningful roles in Caledon and the rest of Peel."

Staff from Mayor Allan Thompson's office told the Citizen, "The purpose of this day is a connecting of seniors in celebration of Older Person and their involvement in volunteering, within the community and as a Town initiative. This is to help them belong as an antidote to loneliness."

Loneliness has the same impact on mortality as smoking 15 cigarettes a day, making it even more dangerous than obesity. (Cigna chief Medical officer)

Loneliness is a growing health epidemic. We live in the most technologically connected age in the history of civilization, yet the rates of loneliness have doubled since the 1980's.

The IDOP event was open to any seniors that wanted to attend there were notices in the paper and it was advertised at the seniors centre as well. Volunteer MBC strives to connect to the people in the community, both those willing and able to volunteer and those in need.

Mayor Allan Thompson was there to say a few words. In part.

He said, "In our community of Caledon, [the figures tell us that] in 10 years, over 50 percent of the population will be 55 and older.

"This year's theme for IDOP internationally is Equality. I support this theme because, what the older person still has to offer to the sustainability of the developing world needs to be respected and honoured. And that needs to start in our communities.

"In Caledon, our older adults makes up the majority of our volunteers. They are actively engaged in many local initiatives I would say they are the most invested demographic in Caledon."

His hope was that the attendees would find the events on offer over the course of the day inspiring, and give them an increased sense of belonging in Caledon.

Carine Strong, Executive Director at Volunteer MBC was the lead on one such presentation.

"Why create Volunteer MBC? To grow caring, connected communities together," she said.

?A sense of belonging is the antidote to loneliness.?

Carine pointed out that volunteering is associated with lower mortality rates and longer life expectancy; makes one happy; combats depression. She talked about the value of the connection among people, the value of being useful and making others happy; the intense rewards of feeling needed and enjoying the friendships of others.

She made some surprising remarks, like telling us that nearly half of organizations in Ontario are run by volunteers. 13.3 million volunteers across Canada contribute two billion hours of their time. And she left them with the thought from Coretta Scott King, ?The greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate action of its members.?

For more information on how to become involved with volunteering, you can call 905-238-2622 or email info@volunteermbc.org