

Volunteering matters

by SHERALYN ROMAN

If you know me at all, or are at least a semi-regular reader of this column, you'll know that I firmly believe in the power of one. That is to say, if each of us did ONE thing, TOGETHER we could accomplish so much. National Volunteer Week started April 16 and continues through until this coming Saturday, April 22, and it is an ideal opportunity to talk about why volunteering matters.

Perhaps you saw the press release or heard through your social media feeds that this special week honouring and thanking volunteers was taking place. Maybe you are even one of the many, many community volunteers who is being thanked in some way by the organization(s) to whom you donate your time. I'd like to use this space to add my name to the list of people who are saying an enormous 'THANK YOU' to each and every one of you who volunteer your time and talents to the wide array of organizations, boards and committees, community service groups, sports clubs, arts and cultural committees and youth-oriented activities who benefit from them.

I say this as both a community member who volunteers and, full disclosure, as an individual currently working with an organization whose express purpose is to encourage people to volunteer and connect them with volunteer opportunities. In other words, I'm really kind of 'into' volunteering!

The Town of Caledon, annually, hosts a Community Recognition evening celebrating the extensive list of volunteers in our community by providing an opportunity for everyone to gather together and be recognized for their efforts. Almost invariably, the people sitting in the room when this event takes place are reluctant to be there. That's because, if you were to ask them why they volunteer, while they would happily cite a variety of reasons for donating their time and talents, being 'recognized' publicly for doing so is almost never one of them! This year's event has apparently been postponed but let's hope when it does happen, together we will all have a chance to see for ourselves the quiet unsung heroes who help make every day better.

People volunteer for any number of reasons and they do so either formally or informally. There are those in our local neighbourhoods who show up at events to lend a helping hand, collect empties as part of a bottle drive or help to set up event tents. There are those who volunteer more formally as a baseball coach, a parent advisory council member, at a local animal refuge or by supporting young adults with neurodiversities.

Volunteers sit at Board tables assisting organizations like CCS, Family Transition Place, Hospice Dufferin, Bethell Hospice, the Caledon Parent Child Centre or The Dufferin Parent Support Network to name just a few. Board work helps organizations to plan for the future, govern their finances or bylaws or helps to conduct significant fundraising campaigns. Still other volunteers are working behind the scenes at The Exchange or Orangeville Food Bank ensuring shelves are stocked for families experiencing food insecurity.

You get the idea - a great deal of work goes on in Caledon and Dufferin and in communities across the country that many of us may not even realize is being done. Here's the thing, if it wasn't - if there were no volunteers helping to make communities better - the kind of communities (and country) that we know, love, value and appreciate living in, just wouldn't be the same.

Volunteer Canada is the overarching agency responsible for setting the tone and theme of National Volunteer Week. In 2023, it's this: Volunteers Weave Us Together.

I sometimes take things rather literally and for me, the theme of 'woven together' calls up images of a beautiful and brightly stitched blanket that envelops and surrounds the community. Protecting us from the elements, providing warmth and comfort, it is a blanket (or better yet, a quilt) that is woven together one square at a time by caring hands who do the volunteer work necessary to make Caledon and Dufferin County a better place.

If that's a bit too 'dreamy' for you, how about these important facts: Volunteering provides the equivalent work of 2.5 million jobs and contributes more than 3% to our GDP. While the pandemic saw a dip in overall volunteer numbers, we are slowly rebounding toward pre-pandemic numbers where more than 80% of Canadians volunteered in some way or another. That is not only an astonishing number, it's also one of the highest in the world! Volunteering, it appears, is in our blood and isn't just a 'nice' thing to do, it's necessary to our social and economic well-being!

Finally, if you're looking for something to do believe me when I say there is literally something for everyone.

Visit the Town of Caledon's website to search for opportunities on town committees or visit [VolunteerDufferin.ca](#) where you'll find 160 member organizations looking for people right now. There's also [VolunteerMBC](#) (Mississauga, Brampton, Caledon) where even more volunteer positions are listed. Many are also specifically designed for students who need to fulfill their community involvement requirements for graduation. If you need any more motivation, know that according to study after study, volunteering offers many benefits, not just for the community but also for you personally. They include: improved self-confidence and social skills, learning new skills that may also contribute to employability and career advancement and even result in improvements to one's physical and mental health. So, get out there and volunteer - if we all do a little bit, together we can do a lot!