

Volunteering promoted at Mayor's Business Breakfast

By Bill Rea

Caledon does have quite a bit going for it, and there was recently some confirmation from another perspective.

Kirk Brannon, president of Brannon Steel and incoming chair of the Headwaters Health Care Foundation, was the featured speaker at last week's Mayor's Business Breakfast, hosted by Mayor Allan Thompson.

It was not a talk in the conventional sense. Rather, it took the form of an interview, with Thompson asking the questions.

Brannon is a life-long resident of Caledon, who started out working on a local dairy farm before working for Brannon Steel.

"We all need to listen more," he observed. "I think listening is the key."

Although he works in Brampton, Brannon said many of the 150 people working for his company live in Caledon, and he's mindful of that, and the need to support Caledon.

He also pointed out many people are willing to give money to help support the community, but they need to offer their time as well. They need to seek out what they have a passion for, and then support it.

Brannon reflected on the challenges facing Headwaters. He said there is a successful hospital in the community, but it's up to the people living here to make sure it's properly equipped. Government puts up the buildings, but he pointed out what goes inside has to come from the community.

He also stressed that a strong hospital in the area is important to the community. That's one of the things companies look for before they locate in an area.

Thompson pointed out it's sometimes hard to be supportive, as people and the economy have their ups and downs.

"When things are tight, it's pretty hard to get out the cheque book," he observed.

Brannon agreed everyone has to deal with highs and lows.

"You learn how to struggle through," he added, pointing out people can still offer some time if money is short.

Thompson said he's been advocating to get rid of red tape and make processes more streamline.

Brannon said the key is government should be there to help businesses, not run them. It's important to make sure taxes are fair and reasonable.

Thompson said the Town's Economic Development Department is trying to be a guiding hand for business.

"It's all about people," Brannon said, urging companies to support their employees and encourage their staffs to support their communities. Building stronger employees helps build stronger communities, he maintained.

"You've got to be happy in your work place," he said. "You've got to be happy as a volunteer."

One woman commented on the need to use social media as a way to engage small business people.

Thompson agreed, pointing out the coming generation is developing that skill set. He urged people to observe how a four-year-old can manage an iPad.

Brannon said the Headwaters Foundation brought in a young person to help them engage more youth. They are now putting out the message in a different way from what they did before.

Former Brampton councillor John Sanderson was impressed with the stress on teamwork.

"You cannot do it alone," he declared. "You can steer, but you've got to have the rowers behind you."

Several people pointed to Caledon's volunteer base, and the passion behind it.

"I just do things I like doing," Brannon explained. "Volunteering is something I enjoy doing."

"It's kind of selfish," he added. "The more I volunteer, the happier I seem to be."

The Mayor also used the occasion to promote a book by former Alberta MLA Doug Griffiths entitled *13 Ways to Kill Your Community*. Thompson said he met Griffiths at a function earlier this year, and was encouraged by what he heard from him.

"He's seen it all," Thompson declared.

He added Griffiths has seen a number of communities die through things like lack of engagement. In Caledon, he maintained, council has a nine-prong work plan, which has been compiled after consultation with the public, through town hall sessions, etc.

There are some approaches that are key to the well being of the community. Thompson stressed his efforts to bring broadband internet to the whole town. Caledon has joined South Western Integrated Fibre Technology (SWIFT) with 18 other municipalities, and the aim is to bring high-speed internet access to all these places.

"We're all in this together," he remarked.

Improving customer service at the Town has been a priority with Thompson since he ran for office more than two years ago, as he heard throughout the campaign that was something that was lacking.

?You've got to work at it all the time,? he said.



Mayor Allan Thompson and Kirk Brannon held a discussion of various issues at the Mayor's Business Breakfast last week.