

Volunteers needed for HomeJames for another year

The Holidays are upon us, and so is the season for celebrating; sometimes to excess.

That's where HomeJames comes in.

HomeJames is a service which people can call if they think they may have had too much to drink and are not fit to drive. A team of volunteers is dispatched to collect the driver and passengers, and get them and their vehicle to their destination. Although this is a free service, voluntary contributions are always gratefully received.

The service depends on volunteers.

The roots of HomeJames-Caledon goes back nine years as a chapter of Quebec-based Operation Red Nose before being transformed into the Caledon chapter of the Community Designated Drivers Association, a registered, Ontario non-profit organization created by Stan Janes and like minded individuals in Chatham, Ontario.

Its founding sponsors included Bolton Rotary, Palgrave Rotary, Bolton Lions, Bolton Kinsmen, the Town of Caledon, the Ontario Provincial Police and every new car dealership in Caledon.

The program starts tomorrow (Friday) night, and will run every Friday and Saturday night until Dec. 23 (taking Christmas Eve off). It will also be operating Dec. 30 and 31. The aim is to ensure safe passage home to any driver and passengers who may feel their security at risk as the result of driver impairment, however caused.

Over the years, HomeJames has evolved into an organization which now requires more than 130 volunteers deployed as call takers, dispatchers, drivers and communicators, now backed by a new, sophisticated, computerized SmartPhone communication system utilizing contemporary emergency services dispatching techniques. It's expected that by 4 a.m. Jan. 1, HomeJames will have delivered as many as 1,500 drivers and their passengers safely to their homes during its 2016 season.

The challenge has always been to attract a sufficient number of volunteers and sponsors to meet the demands for HomeJames services. For a second year, with the help of Tim Hortons, HomeJames will stage vehicles in various locations within Caledon and its immediate neighbourhoods to reduce average service times to less than 40 minutes per call. Cars will be staged in Bolton, Caledon East, Palgrave, Caledon village and West Caledon, each occupied by two drivers and a navigator.

The first driver operates the client car to deliver its driver and the passengers safely home in the client's vehicle. The navigator will utilize the new HomeJames SmartPhone dispatch system to ensure efficient trip co-ordination while the second driver follows in a shuttle vehicle provided by each of Caledon's new car dealerships or Enterprise car rentals.

In its first eight years, more than 6,500 people have shared this community service. And, on nights during which HomeJames has operated, the OPP report no serious traffic collisions involving serious injury or death caused by impaired driving in the Caledon area.