

Volunteers thanked for making HomeJames a success

By Bill Rea

Caledon has always been known for its volunteer spirit, and in some cases, that adds to the safety of the community.

That is the case with the HomeJames program again this year, and the program took last Thursday evening to thank the people who helped make it all happen.

‘We did surprisingly well,’ HomeJames ? Caledon Chairman Tayler Parnaby declared.

HomeJames operated Friday and Saturday nights in the weeks leading up to the holidays. The service enabled people to call if they thought they may have had too much to drink and were not fit to drive. A team of volunteers was dispatched to collect the driver and passengers, and get them and their vehicle to their destination.

Parnaby said there were a number of changes to the program this year. The main operation was run out of Albion-Bolton Community Centre. There were also changes to the technology used, and that resulted in some glitches.

But Parnaby was quick to credit the Town of Caledon for helping to sort things out, and Network and Server Administrator Jasjot Narula.

‘Jasjot worked around the clock,’ Parnaby remarked. ‘Jas, you saved our butt!’

The program also made use of new smartphone technology, which he said is very impressive.

‘Its extraordinary what it can do,’ he declared, pointing out it replaced the need for two-way radios in the shuttle vehicles. It also enabled dispatchers to know where each team was at any one time.

The statistics tell a story too.

Parnaby said there 393 runs completed during the holiday program, helping out drivers who were concerned they might not be able to drive home safely. Those drivers got home with their vehicles, along with 1,002 passengers, meaning 1,395 individuals got to their destinations.

There were 126 volunteers who took part, and the average person put in 3.44 shifts. He also cited Brendan Gibney, Vice-President of Operations Marg Jones and Simon Lem, who each put in 13 shifts.

Although the service is free, donations are gratefully accepted. Parnaby said they came to \$11,609, or roughly \$29.54 per run. That was more money than was contributed last year, which was impressive since the program ran for two fewer evenings. He also said the technology helped for better coordination, which cut down on the amount of distance vehicles had to travel.

The main statistic he cited is there were no serious or fatal collisions the nights the program was running.

Inspector Ryan Carothers, commander of Caledon OPP, called it ‘absolutely incredible,’ as he praised the volunteers' efforts.

‘You should stand up and give yourselves a round of applause,’ he added.

Although the Reduce Impaired Driving Everywhere (RIDE) campaign runs all year, he said there is a concentration during the holidays.

‘We're taking more people off the roads than they're putting in the ground,’ he commented.

Carothers added he has no sympathy for people who drive while impaired, pointing out when there are fatal accidents involving drinking and driving, it's often the impaired driver who survives. He also said it's hard on the officers who have to break the news to the families of victims of impaired drivers.

‘Thank you for your efforts and thank you for volunteering and taking some of the more responsible impaired drivers home,’ he told the volunteers. ‘You are saving lives out there. That's the main thing.’

Carothers also said he's heard it's fun to volunteer for the program, and there was a lot of agreement with that.

Jones read some letters from people who have been involved with the program, including people who have used it. One was impressed to have been driven home New Year's Eve by Mayor Allan Thompson. Another volunteer wrote ‘I had a blast.’

‘This is a great community that gets together to help the community,’ Deputy Fire Chief Mark Wallace commented, adding the number of calls that Caledon Fire and Emergency Services have to respond to are down when the program is operating. He asked everyone to imagine what might have happened if those people who used the program had had to drive themselves home.

Wallace also recalled attending a function at a local hall, and seeing the HomeJames Mascot enter.

‘I think he did a five-minute routine on the dance floor,’ he remarked, adding it helped spread awareness of the program to many in the room.

‘It's unbelievable what you do out there,’ he told the volunteers, ‘and it's immeasurable what you've saved.’

‘Thank you for what you've done,’ Thompson said. ‘Every one of you contributed to keeping our community whole.’

Thompson was also impressed with the number of younger people who made use of the program.

'All of you made that happen,' he said.

Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones has also volunteered with the program, pointing out it's enabled her to meet a lot of people and engage the community.

She also told the volunteers what they do 'just speaks to what makes our community special.'

Dufferin-Caledon MP David Tilson was not able to be on hand last week, but Parnaby read a message from him.

'It's an incredible program with many, many wonderful people,' he said.



Those on hand for last Thursday's volunteer appreciation evening for HomeJames included HomeJames ' Caledon Chairman Tayler Parnaby, Inspector Ryan Carothers of Caledon OPP, MPP Sylvia Jones, Vice-President of Operations Marg Jones, Mayor Allan Thompson and Deputy Fire Chief Mark Wallace. Photos by Bill Rea



Always the gentleman, the HomeJames mascot assisted Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones off the stage.



All the volunteers for HomeJames in the time leading up to the holidays were eligible to win this Samsung UHD TV, which was donated by Susan Carberry. HomeJames ' Caledon Chairman Tayler Parnaby presented the prize to Bolton area resident Jasvir

Dhaliwal.