

Youth isn't wasted on the young

by BROCK WEIR

It's often said that youth is wasted on the young.

Nobody knows for sure exactly who coined the phrase. Variations of it are attributed to such writers and wits as George Bernard Shaw and Oscar Wilde, but as far as my research and that of others can tell, there is no agreed upon first instance of it hitting our public consciousness.

Youth is the most beautiful thing in this world and what a pity that it has to be wasted on children! is one oh-so-close comment attributed to Shaw.

If the adage can indeed be attributed to Shaw, evidently it took hold as it seems the quote was inextricably considered part of his long list of linguistic contributions while he was still active, writing, and coming up with more turns of phrase that continue to turn heads.

But, as far as phrases go, does it really hold water?

People of my own generation might have a unique perspective on the matter.

I was born in 1985, and there seems to be a disagreement on whether that puts me in the company of Generation X or the Millennials. Some sources define Gen X as pertaining to those born between 1965 and 1980, immediately following the Baby Boomer generation. Others define it as people born between 1976 and 1985, while Millennial area is variously plotted as 1981-1996, or more narrowly 1990-1998.

In hindsight, not only were us 1985 babies in-betweeners, perhaps being able to navigate our way around some of the more negative perceptions of each bookending generations of Gen Z and Millennial, but we were and, one supposes, are subject to constantly moving goal posts on just what constitutes youth.

Not too long ago, youth pertained to anyone 18-and-under, with some variations depending on your geographic location widening the window to 19-and-under and 21-and-under. Shortly thereafter, youth was extended to those 25-and-under, with tributes to, for instance, Top 25 Under 25 lists in your field of choice coming into the fore.

I thought we'd topped out at 25 for a few years until I went on a mission to secure a ticket to a very important event in Ottawa about 15 years ago and was astonished that their cut-off for youth tickets reached all the way to the thirtysomethings. An apparently arbitrary thirty-one, to be exact. I thought that was kind of a stretch, personally, but being 26-ish at the time, I wasn't going to argue with a \$40 discount. When a similar event took place last year, I was surprised the youth cut-off had been extended to a whopping 37.

Overshooting that goal post by a year-and-a-half may or may not have sparked a minor existential crisis in me, but I was buoyed a resurgence in Top 40 Under 40 events not so much now in my forty-first year, but I'm sure the goal posts will be moved again, potentially by those who insist that fifty is the new forty usually those who have crossed the half-century mark.

Regardless of how it's defined, National Youth Week starts on Friday and I'm glad to see that many of our communities have stepped up with programs designed to engage and inspire youth while keeping them active and creative at the same time.

In Aurora, for instance, which defines youth as far as programming is concerned as between the ages of 12 and 17, is hitting the ground running, opening the week with a flag raising ceremony and live music into the evening, followed by six days of events

ranging from sports drop-ins and craft activities.

In fact, the celebration of youth is not limited to Youth Week itself.

The party will be extended through May 13 with the Town's annual Youth Innovation Fair, always a favourite event to attend, as students from across York Region converge on the community with ideas simple and elaborate to improve our future in some way.

In Caledon, regular youth programs will continue as usual during Youth Week with drop-in games, activities and more at both Southfields Community Centre and the Caledon Centre for Recreation and Wellness.

There is certainly no shortage of things to do, but I can't help but think there is a missed opportunity in here somewhere.

The start of Youth Week 2026 coincides with the first day residents looking for the chance to represent their communities at the municipal level, whether they're seeking the top job of Mayor, any number of Council positions, and even education trustee roles.

What a golden opportunity to encourage youth to get involved with their communities at the civic level, learn about what each position means and, if they meet the age requirements, consider putting themselves forward for contention.

As the Youth Innovation Fair reminds us each year, younger citizens have no shortage of ideas on how to improve the world in which we all live and, by the very existence of these ideas, they prove time and time again that they have their fingers on the pulse on the issues that matter to them and their peers ? which are, more often than not, the same issues that matter to the community as a whole.

Yet, rare are the times when people who might fall under the myriad definitions of youth offered above feel encouraged to step forward and bring their ideas to a wider arena, and some might even be actively discouraged due to some vague idea that certain life experiences need to be had before they even consider trying to bring their voice to the proverbial table.

Councils should ideally reflect the community they serve and that includes all eligible voices 18 and above, and the voices of youth, middle-agers and seniors, are all relevant and due consideration.

It might be simply a matter of encouragement.

To all those considering putting their names forward for the first time this week through the close of municipal candidate registration in August, congratulations! You're making a bold step. You see a place where you can have impact, make a difference, and represent your neighbours. Politics is not for the faint-hearted, particularly in this extremely polarized and often (sadly) combative political environment we're unfortunately enduring at the moment.

To go the distance, you'll need the courage of your convictions and a certain thickness of skin, if you haven't developed that already ? those factors will serve you well.

But, above all, it takes courage and compassion not only to identify where things can be improved or further, but put yourselves up front to help foster a better future.

Kudos to all of you, and make sure there's space at the table.