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FREE ISSUE

Large events raise risk of COVID-19 spread: York Region Public Health

By MIKE ANDERSON

With the number of positive COVID-19 cases rising to seven in York Region, Dr. Karim Kurji, York's Medical Officer of Health, says there is still no evidence of the novel coronavirus spreading in the community, and the risk to residents remains low.

However, he issued a stark warning to faith and community leaders to think twice about holding large events for upcoming religious holidays like Passover and Easter.

Speaking at a news conference held on March 6, Dr. Kurji stopped short of issuing an outright ban, but said that large events could increase the risk of COVID-19 spreading in the community.

"The main risk comes from somebody breaking self-isolation and coming into a large event that one may have organized," Dr. Kurji said. "This can happen because a person didn't fully understand their responsibilities during self-isolation, language barriers, or other reasons."

"Unfortunately, we don't have 100 per cent assurance that every traveller from a high-risk place, the newest being Iran, observes the 14-day period of self-isolation, even though we may call them frequently," Dr. Kurji added.

Dr. Kurji is concerned that Public health



DOUG POIRIER AND FRIENDS

Perchin for MS raises \$21,000 in its final year

By MIKE ANDERSON

One of Georgina's local heroes is calling it a day. After a decade of organizing Perchin for MS, one of Lake Simcoe's premier ice fishing derbies, and raising more than \$186,000 for Multiple Sclerosis, Doug Poirier is moving on.

It's was a hard decision. But Mr. Poirier's MS has progressed to the point where he can no longer put in the time required to make the derby a success.

"This is our last year, so it's kind of bittersweet for sure," Mr. Poirier said. "I love

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

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COVID-19 CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

investigators may not be able to conduct case investigations for large numbers of potentially infected people. "That would be a great strain on our resources, a strain on laboratory resources as far as testing goes, and also a large number of members of congregations may well have to go into self-isolation depending on what follows," Dr. Kurji said.

If faith and community leaders decide to proceed with events, Dr. Kurji wants them to mitigate the risk by keeping the event small or breaking it up into smaller groups. He also wants them to curtail activities that could spread the virus more quickly, including eliminating food buffets, singing and cheering.

"When an infectious individual sings, the droplets may go way beyond the immediate vicinity of that individual," he said. "If a sick person coughs on a buffet, it is possible that we may have a problem."

Dr. Kurji also confirmed that the latest positive case in York Region is a 64-year-old woman from Richmond Hill, who returned home from Iran on March 2.

While the woman is in self-isolation, she travelled on a GO bus from Pearson Airport to Richmond Hill. But Metrolinx, in a tweet, said she had minimal contact with the driver and the bus was relatively empty, so risk was very low. Nevertheless, public health investigators have contacted 60 causal contacts and 17 close contacts made by the woman. They are currently waiting for test results, although one close contact has tested negative.

Dr. Kurji also confirmed that all seven of the region's positive cases are travel-related, four, including the latest, from Iran and three from Egypt.

There was concern last week that one of the cases may have

visited Georgina when a 70-year-old Newmarket woman tested positive at Southlake Regional Health Centre after returning from Egypt.

However, Dr. Kurji confirmed that she didn't visit Georgina, or have any casual contacts, only close contact with four family members, who were also placed in self-isolation.

Currently, there are nearly 100 people in self isolation in the region waiting for test results, that's up from 34 earlier in the week.

Meanwhile, public health officials are testing patients exhibiting flu-like symptoms referred by clinicians. Dr. Kurji said that they have tested some 364 people, and all have tested negative.

Also, the province's surveillance program, operating in Toronto area hospitals, have tested 300 individuals, with no positive results.

While York Region hospitals have not been included in the provincial surveillance program, Dr. Kurji said that's about to change with the inclusion of Mackenzie Richmond Hill Hospital.

Dr. Kurji believes that the addition of York Region hospitals will provide him with a "better handle on anything that starts to appear in York Region."

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Editorial: a dark secret revealed

Recently, the Post was invited to tour the Sandgate Women's Shelter in Jackson's Point. The exact location of the shelter is a closely guarded secret and for a good reason.

According to Michelle Smith, the shelter's executive director, there have been numerous attempts by estranged husbands and boyfriends to gain access to the facility. Sometimes, they try to impersonate family members, journalists or even police officers.

The shelter has recently installed security cameras and bulletproof glass to ensure the safety of its residents.

Staff also instruct residents to stay off social media and disable the GPS on their cell phones, so their exact whereabouts can't be determined.

These precautions are necessary because violence against women continues unabated in our society.

Last year, there were 37 femicides in Ontario, with a male partner or family member responsible for most of the deaths.

In Canada, according to researchers with the Canadian Domestic Homicide Prevention Initiative, women continue to make up 75 per cent of domestic homicides.

Nationally, on average, a woman is killed every 2.5 days, most often at the hands of someone they trusted. That

statistic hasn't changed in over four decades.

Currently, there are not enough women's shelters and emergency beds to deal with rising rates of domestic violence.

A recent CBC news report found that as many as 19,000 women and children in Canada are turned away from women's shelters each month, due to a lack of available beds.

We urgently need a national action plan on violence against women, something experts have been calling for decades.

Such a plan should make federal infrastructure dollars available to expand the size and number of women's shelters across Canada.

We also need to attack the problem at its root cause, by allocating more resources to change attitudes and behaviours and to promote true gender equality.

Men and boys must know that violence against women and girls is unacceptable in our society.

During the last federal election, the Liberals promised \$30 million to fund a national action plan. But so far, there has been little movement from the government on this issue.

It's time for our elected officials to act; violence against women shouldn't remain a dark secret, it needs to be exposed for all to see.

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PERCHIN CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

what this has done. But every year it's so much work, and my health has gotten worse."

Diagnosed with MS in late 2009, Mr. Poirier started Perching for MS in 2010 to raise awareness about the disease and to encourage people with disabilities to get outside and stay active.

At the first derby, he was able to walk with a cane, but as the disease progressed, he was forced to use a motorized wheelchair equipped with tracks to get around on the ice.

But that didn't stop him from building-up Perchin for MS into one of the lake's most popular ice fishing derbies, attracting major sponsors, like Cabela's, Rapala and Hummingbird, and 500 anglers most years.

But the biggest measure of success for Mr. Poirier has been raising funds and awareness for MS.

"I'm sort of a face for MS. I love the fact that I get a lot of people who come up to me and ask me about it. We get phone calls from a lot of people who have just been diagnosed. So that's great."

Mr. Poirier has also encouraged anglers with MS to participate, and each year between five and ten did so.

"I like the fact that people are getting excited to go fishing on the lake," he said. "It's a lot of work for someone who has MS. So it's neat to see them come out and support us too."

Held on February 29, this year's event was another success with great draw prizes, sponsored contests, and a live and silent auction. In total, there was \$50,000 in prizes up for grabs. Despite warmer weather, nearly 300 anglers tried their luck on the ice off Sibbald Point Provincial Point. While the perch weren't biting for everyone, a lot of teams managed a respectable catch.

But a lot of anglers weren't just

in it for the fishing.

"It's social. You make new friends," said Tonia Cooper, who's been taking part in the derby for the past three years. "But the main thing is to support Doug and his cause. More awareness needs to be raised for MS. More money for research to see if we can find a cure."

After the weigh-in, an emotional Mr. Poirier thanked the folks that supported him and the derby for the past decade.

"We've been going for ten years. I can't say how proud that makes me. I want to say thank you to our sponsors, the anglers, our volunteers, my friends and especially my family," he said. "Both this event and I have had tremendous support, and I can't say thank you enough. I hope people will remember this tournament for all the good it has done to help fight this debilitating disease."

Over the years, money raised by the derby was donated to the MS Society, York North MS Chapter, funding yoga and support programs. It also benefited MS sufferers and their supporters directly, through gift cards.

And, provided funding for the Assistive Technologies Clinic in the MS section of Baycrest Hospital, paying for treatments not covered by OHIP, including the use of anti-gravity machines, robotic exoskeleton physiotherapy, and specialty chairs and walkers.



DOUG POIRIER

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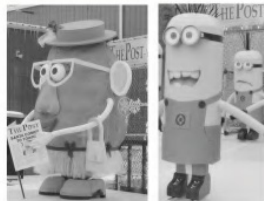
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GALE CAREY, CAROLINE MULRONEY, MICHELLE SMITH & ELEANOR LEGGAT

Grant helps local women's shelter upgrade facilities

By MIKE ANDERSON

Sandgate Women's Shelter in Jackson's Point was the recent recipient of a \$78,800 provincial grant, which allowed the shelter to complete much-needed upgrades to its kitchen and washroom facilities.

The grant was arranged by MPP Caroline Mulroney's constituency office and provided through the Partner Facility Renewal Program (PFR), launched by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, as part of \$950,000 investment in community social service agencies.

Michelle Smith, Sandgate's Executive Director, and several board members arranged a special tour for Ms. Mulroney on Feb 29, in part to show-off the new upgrades, but also to personally thank her and her staff for helping to secure the funding.

According to Ms. Smith, provincial grants are critical to a shelter like Sandgate, because it means that funds don't have to be taken out of essential programs to pay for renovations.

Ms. Smith said that the upgrades were necessary to provide a comfortable setting for

women and their families and to deal with the problem of ageing infrastructure, as the shelter building is over a hundred-years-old.

"We need to make sure that our space is in good shape so that women leaving their homes know that they have an environment conducive to healing," she said.

"The kitchen is the heart of the home. And having an up-to-date kitchen is important when you're trying to have someone feel welcome and safe," added Ms. Mulroney, who was happy that the funding was arranged quickly and the renovations completed in time for International Women's Day.

"Sandgate provides an essential service for women and children escaping violence. The needs are increasing, and we have to make sure that they've got the facilities that they need to be able to welcome them."

Indeed, there is a growing demand for Sandgate's shelter beds, including an increase in the number of young mothers with large families — many of them newcomers to Canada — seeking assistance.

Last year, Sandgate, which operates shelters in Jackson's Point and Richmond Hill, provided emergency housing for more than 300 women and children.

According to Ms. Smith, there are many factors responsible for the increased demand, including rising levels of domestic abuse, human trafficking and poverty.

But she says one of major reasons is the social stigma of leaving an abusive relationship is waning, encouraging more women to seek help.

"The stigma is not as great as it once was," Ms. Smith said. "And that means more women are coming forward to a shelter than before. Our numbers have always been higher. Our shelter beds have always been full. And, it's putting more pressure on the need for beds in our region."

Indeed, while many women transition out of the shelter after several months, some –unable to

find affordable housing — take as much as a year or more, putting further pressure on available beds.

While Sandgate's shelters are open 24-hours, seven days a week, they can only offer a total of 30 emergency beds. And with their shelters often operating at capacity, this means many women and their families are redirected to other shelters across Ontario.

Despite statistics indicating that domestic violence against women is on the rise, there are only two emergency women's shelters operating in York Region, Sandgate and its sister agency Yellow Brick House. Clearly, the problem of not enough capacity isn't going to go away anytime soon.

"We're looking at a million-and-a-half population, rising domestic violence and only 70 beds in the region. So, it's troublesome," Ms. Smith said.



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Bill C-204: Banning the export of Non-recyclable plastic



SCOT DAVIDSON
Column

– but in 2018 alone, more than 45,000 tonnes of plastic waste was exported from Canada to foreign countries, including Malaysia, India, Thailand and Taiwan.

Around the world, other countries have already taken action. The United Kingdom and Australia have brought forward similar plastic waste export bans, while smaller countries like Malaysia have told Canada that they are no longer willing to be the “dumping site of the world.”

To date, the Liberal Government has resisted all calls to implement such a ban themselves. But, my colleagues in the Conservative Opposition, as well as Members of Parliament from the Green Party, the NDP and the Bloc Quebecois, have voiced their support for Bill C-204. So there is growing pressure on the Liberal MPs to support it as well.

I will be working hard to see Bill C-204 passed in the House of Commons in the coming weeks. This is a real opportunity for Canada to show global leadership for the environment, and an opportunity for Canadian innovation to shine.

The issue of plastic pollution is one that affects us all – right here in Georgina, across our country, and around the world.

That’s why I recently introduced my Private Member’s Bill C-204 to ban the export of non-recyclable plastic waste from Canada to foreign countries.

For too long, Canada has been sending its plastic garbage overseas for other countries to process. Often, this waste is not disposed of properly and ends up being dumped in the ocean or illegally burned. This poisons the air and water and has serious repercussions for our global environment.

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Local “Leaper” celebrated her 8th birthday on February 29

By MICHELLE POIRITER

The odds of a person being born on a leap day are just 1 in 1,461 since this day only comes around every four years. Stephanie Fay Hofman is one of those people.

She was born on February 29, 1988, in Clinton, Iowa, which means this year she turned eight.

“We call ourselves Leapers,” she said. “And none of us have a problem with being born on a leap day. We think it’s quite special.”

Ms. Hofman, who lives in Jackson’s Point, usually celebrates her fake birthday on February 28.

But this year “Leapers” got to celebrate on their actual birthday, and she says when that happens, it’s a special occasion.

On February 29, Ms. Hofman celebrated turning eight with friends and family at her Uxbridge church with a potluck and board game night.

But this was not the original birthday plan for the mother of four.

“I was supposed to go on a cruise to the Bahamas with 78 other leap day babies. It was quite the to-do,” she said.

The trip was planned two years in advance, but she became pregnant and had her baby on January 10, 2020.

Ms. Hofman doesn’t believe in the superstitions surrounding the day; she’s had good birthdays and bad birthdays.

“This year my son made me



STEPHANIE CELEBRATES HER EIGHTH BIRTHDAY WITH JOSHUA

breakfast. He’s looking forward to the day where he is older than me because he’s seven now. So then we’ll be the same age for a year, and then he’ll out age me,” she said.

While she rarely has a problem with having her birthday on February 29, cyber shopping can be a challenge because drop-down menus often don’t display the date.

And, she remembers a trip to Las Vegas for her 21st birthday where things didn’t go to plan.

“They wouldn’t let me gamble on February 28, they made me wait until March 1,” she said.

The next leap day will be in 2024, where Ms. Hofman and other “Leapers” will try to break the Guinness World Record for most leap day babies in one spot, which stands at 250.

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For more information and to register:

Geraldine (905) 722-4616 ex5475 or geraldine@acloserlookgeorgina.ca



A Closer Look is a two-year community development initiative funded by United Way Greater Toronto and executed by the three organizations: Routes Connecting Communities, Jericho Youth Services and the Georgina Community Food Pantry.

COMING EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

GPL(Sutton), Oscar Encore! Every Tuesday in March - movie starts at 6:30 p.m. Free, Drop-In: Join us for weekly screenings of some of the contenders for this year's Best Picture category from the Academy Awards (including the winner!). Feel free to bring your own peanut-free snacks and non-alcoholic drinks, pillows, blankets, and a friend. March 17: Judy; March 24: Parasite.

GACAG - Images of Home, Two Perspectives. Exhibition from March 1 to April 5. Paintings by Jennifer Zsolt and photographs by Tom Zsolt. Georgina Arts Centre & Gallery, 194 High St, Sutton.

GPL(Pefferlaw), Effective Tax Strategies, Sunday, March 15, 2 - 3 p.m. Free, Registration Required, Emily Trotter from Trotter and Associates is back again, this time with easy-to-understand information about Canada's tax system and how to minimize the amount of tax you pay! To register, visit any GPL branch or call Pefferlaw branch.

Belvedere Cookhouse, Pefferlaw - St. Patrick's Day Party, Tuesday, March 17, 5 - 9 p.m. Free, The Liverspots are back for their 15th St. Patrick's Day party at the Belvedere Cookhouse in Pefferlaw. Better to be an institution than be in one. The Belvedere always puts on a great St. Pats. It starts early this year so you can plan for dinner and some frolic and still be home for the National.

Link Winter Market, Sunday, March 15, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Enjoy this popular one-of-a-kind shopping experience right in the heart of Georgina. It's the last of the season! Find gifts and treasures from local artisans, chefs, farmers and more. A great Sunday outing including horse-drawn wagon rides, live music, food demos and more!

Cardboard Toboggan Races, The ROC, Thursday, March 19, 12 p.m. - 1 p.m. For a full list of rules, regulations and registration from, visit georgina.ca/events.

GPL (Sutton)- The Art of Downsizing and Decluttering, Saturday, March 21, 2 - 3 p.m. Free, Registration Required, Back by popular demand! Dying to de-clutter your space? Arlene Stephenson, The Downsizing Diva, can show you how simple organizational changes can have a big impact! Learn creative and inexpensive techniques that will help you begin the process of organizing or downsizing your home. To register, visit any GPL branch or call the Sutton branch.

Jackson's Point Winter Market, Sunday, March 22, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. 944 Lake Drive E. This Sunday were having a cat/kitten adoption day, with pet product focused vendors. All proceeds from vendor tables go to GFCC.

Lake Simcoe Gardeners Meeting, Monday, March 23, 7:30 p.m. Keswick United Church, 177 Church St. Join Wing Hong Tse for a talk on "Plants you're never seen Before." Also members dessert competition. Please join us for tea, coffee, goodies and conversation.

North Durham Nature: "Tracing the Roots of Native Plants," Tuesday, March 24, 7 p.m. Uxbridge Senior's Centre, 75 Marietta Street. Paul LaPorte will present a detailed examination on what defines a "native plant" with a focus on how plants evolved, looking specifically at the connections among Ontario's diverse flora. Everyone welcome, donations appreciated.

Jericho's Bingo Night, Friday, March 27, 7 - 11 p.m. Jericho Youth Services presents Georgina Bingo at The Link 20849 Dalton Road, Sutton Minimum cost \$10/person Jackpot \$1000 905.722.5540 #GeorginaBingo.

Udora United Church - Fusion Fashion & Miche Purses, Sat, March 28, 12 p.m. to 4 p.m. Udora Hall. Lunch included. \$15/per person. Tickets available at Udora General Store or call 705-228-8102.

Udora Leaskdale Lions - Spaghetti Dinner, Friday, March 27, 5:30 p.m. Udora Hall. Adults \$15, children over 6 \$5, under 6 no charge. It is all you can eat and includes salad garlic bread desserts and coffee etc.



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