

## Neighbourhood Networks to add King to its umbrella

**By Mark Pavilons**

King Township is the last piece to the puzzle in a large-scale non-profit network that will bring together all municipalities of York's N6.

And King councillors can't wait to make it happen.

Neighbourhood Networks, an endeavour of Magna for Community, is a broad, far-reaching network that matches community groups with resources and volunteers. But it's much more than just a database.

King councillors set the process in motion during their Feb. 23 council meeting, with a formal agreement between the municipality and NN coming soon to council for the stamp of approval.

King will benefit from this giving network and all are eager to bring the network here.

"I'm ecstatic about this," said Mayor Steve Pellegrini. "This fills a void. I'm delighted."

NN is in place throughout York Region and each member municipality has an ambassador to act as a liaison in order to focus the resources locally.

Chris Fasciano, director of Parks, Recreation and Culture, will help facilitate looking for an ambassador once clear direction is given from council.

Erin Cerenzia, NN coordinator, told councillors the network so far has some 260 registered partners and upwards of 7,000 volunteers. Just by the numbers, NN can match 27 volunteers to every community group in the region.

"That's pretty incredible," she said.

They're more than a database, and take a personal approach to help strengthen all relationships.

Through this well organized network, they can offer non-profits and community groups widespread promotion, event posting, social media, newsletter connections, etc. They not only support local endeavours, but they hold their own regular events and programs, including a fall food drive, winter snow removal, holiday gift drive, spring tree planting and scholarships for Grade 12 students.

Since the inception, the network has collected more than \$23,000 and thousands of pounds of food for local food pantries including 1,000 pounds this year alone. Last year (2014) saw them collect over \$12,000 worth of gifts, clothing and gift cards for local charities while, to date, volunteer planting days have resulted in 11,000 plantings of trees, shrubs and bushes spread out across the four participating municipalities.

"I think it is safe to say these programs have had a tremendous impact on our partner municipalities and we're excited to continue to grow and accept the challenge of meeting community needs in the future," she said.

NN helps address local needs and they expertly match volunteers to their preferred local charities which results in a win-win scenario.

Steve Hinder, manager of Magna for Community, noted this Aurora-based internationally renowned company commits annual funding as part of its social responsibility.

NN was founded launched in 2008 by Belinda Stronach, in response to residents looking for local resources in the Newmarket and Aurora areas.

They began with a database of volunteers and organizations and since then have pulled everyone to the table.

Georgina and East Gwillimbury were recently added to the network, leaving King as the final piece to this regional puzzle.

It's a veritable one-stop for all things volunteering, designed to help people give back where they live.

The network also received an enthusiastic response from King-based groups, at the recent event hosted by Arts Society King.