

Township updated on Headwaters Horse Country initiatives

By Angela Gismondi

A progress report on the Headwaters Horse Country (HHC) partnership was presented at the April 13 Committee of the Whole meeting.

In 2013, King committed to a three-year partnership agreement with Headwaters Tourism Association (HT), which includes them in the HHC marketing initiative and earns them a spot on the Headwaters Equine Leadership Group (HELG). Michele Harris, executive director of HHC, updated council on the initiatives and progress the organization has made over the past two years. HELG was formed to promote the Headwaters area ? which includes King, Caledon, Dufferin and Erin ? as the premier equine region in Ontario. It uses a regional collaborative approach that draws upon the resources and assets of the regional municipalities, business and economic development associations, sector and citizen groups to support, grow and advocate for the equine industry. ?HELG's mission is to position the Headwaters Region as a centre of equine excellence and to promote it through tourism,? said Harris.

When they first took on the project, HHC assessed a broad range of areas in the equine industry and now have a good understanding of the industry. Over the past two years, HHC has been able to refine their mandate and has become an aggregate and a hub for all information for the equine industry in the HHC.

Harris also took a few minutes to discuss the initiatives that were undertaken in the second year of the partnership. The HELG Economic Impact Report was completed in April of 2014 and indicates that Headwaters Horse Country is home to over 23,000 horses, over 2,000 horse farms and hundreds of businesses that support these horses and their owners, Harris explained.

The area is also home to four internationally recognized event facilities, two of which are hosting equestrian events for the Toronto 2015 Pan American Games. The report also determined that King Township alone has over 5,070 horses and 273 horse farms.

HELG also took Headwaters Horse Country to market.

?The message of Headwaters Horse Country reached 100,000 residents in southern Ontario with the distribution of the Hills of Headwaters Visitor Guide,? said Harris.

The new www.HeadwatersHorseCountry.ca website was also launched last July and offers a vehicle for industry and visitors to find horse country news, events, businesses and information. The HHC uses an e-newsletter to communicate with the industry on a regular basis. It delivers news and happenings each month to 1,000 equine stakeholders and enthusiasts.

Social media programs such as Facebook and Twitter are now being used as a primary way of engaging and keep stakeholders up to date, Harris added. Forty King equine businesses were added to the database and uploaded to the website business directory most recently.

An art contest to find a signature art piece to represent Horse Country was conducted in the summer of 2014. The winning selection is now being used as part of the marketing and promotion for HHC.

October 2014 was a busy month for HHC. It kicked off with an Evening of Celebration which included entertainment, culinary delights and horses. Over 500 guests had the opportunity to enjoy King Brewery and Holland Marsh Wineries offerings along with culinary creations of some of the region's best restaurants and chefs. The celebration also provided opportunities to connect with horse enthusiast friends and colleagues while watching live demonstrations.

The seventh annual Headwaters Horse Country Stable Tour took place on October 4 and 5. Four of the 11 equine facilities participating in the Stable Tour were based in King Township including WaterStone Estate & Farms, Winsong Farm, Seneca College King Campus Veterinary Technology Program and Gimcrack Equestrian Centre.

On October 24, 2014 the Headwaters Equine Leadership Group hosted an industry forum in Orangeville to present an overview of accomplishments and initiatives over the past two years and to gather insight, experiences and feedback from local equine industry stakeholders. According to Harris, the forum was important in establishing how the organization will move forward in 2015 and beyond, and what they should be focusing on in the years to come.

As for upcoming initiatives, the Headwaters Equine Leadership Group is also presenting the Headwaters Parade of Horses, a unique series of outdoor horse sculptures featuring 20 life size fiberglass horses, which have been transformed by talented local artists. A minimum of four horse statues will be prominently displayed in King during the 2015 Pan American Games and for the months of June through the end of August.

The 2015 Stable Tour will also be taking place over three weekends in July to coincide with the Pan Am Games equestrian event at Caledon Equestrian Park in Palgrave.

In terms of partnerships, Equine Canada plans to launch A Canadian Horse Industry Showcase to demonstrate the diverse range of

horse-related activities in Canada and the quality horses available from Canadian breeders for domestic and international customers. Horse Experience 2015 will be held in parallel to the Pan American Games in the Orangeville, Caledon and Mono area. A report on the matter, submitted by Township staff, recommended that Council continue to support the HHC partnership until March 31, 2016. The recommendation was approved.