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In King it?s all hands on deck!

Mark Pavilons

We often hear living in King Township is a lifestyle choice. It's an option that really offers the best of all worlds.
Mayor Steve Pellegrini, one of our biggest cheerleaders, often tells new residents to be engaged, get involved, shop locally and volunteer. He's adamant that being a contributing member of our community enriches everyone.
And he's right.
There are far too many ?bedroom communities,??where people leave in the morning, come home at night, only to sleep where they live. While I fully appreciate the commuting challenges across the GTA, where we live is vitally important.
It's where were take pride in home ownership. It's where we raise our kids, do our shopping ??we know our grocer or dry cleaner by name. It's where we meet friends for coffee or chat over a meal.
It's our biggest investment, both financially and socially. There's nothing more important than feeling welcome and that communal sense of belonging. For others, who take it a step further, there's nothing like helping a neighbour; promoting the arts or donating to a good cause.
A small gesture recently really brought the message home.
?No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted.?
So true. This sign was posted at St. Mary Catholic Elementary School in Nobleton. There, with much pomp and pageantry, staff, students, politicians and a business owner unveiled the ?Buddy Bench.? If kids are lonely or left out, all they have to do is get to the Buddy Bench, where someone will join them, ask them to play and make them feel better.
It's a rather simple yet powerful gesture that not only embodies this school's attitude, but our community as a whole. That notion did not escape the adults' attention.
It represents an amazing partnership of the school, the school board, local politicians, Township staff, No Frills and the local parish.
And, if you unravel the individual fibers of this amazing ball of string that is our community, you'll see that it all starts with people.
It begins with an idea and then compassionate souls take the ball and run with it.
While it may take a while to get those feet firmly planted in the ground, it's well worth the effort.
It goes way beyond a physical piece of equipment, a monument or statue. This bench is symbol of the best in people ? our ability to empathize, our compassion, our love and our belief system. I'm sure the kids and adults involved in this project learned so much about themselves and others that it will not only give them lingering smiles but add to their list of life's special moments.
John Ciarallo, owner of No Frills in Nobleton, is a huge local supporter. He remains engaged and generous when it comes to his community.
He's been a big booster of the King Township Food Bank for years. He helps countless causes, service clubs and non-profit organizations. He was more than happy to help with the Buddy Bench.
?It's all about the kids,??he said. Seeing them smile when they enjoy this bench and what it stands for is all the thanks he needs. He

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believes that healthy kids make a healthy community and he urged the youngsters at St. Mary to ?pay it forward.?
John is one of our unsung heroes and he epitomizes what King is all about.
We have a very distinct three-tier political system, where each level has its own jurisdiction and set of responsibilities. Many average citizens believe they won't make a difference or their voice won't be heard.
Nothing is further from the truth.
There are countless examples in history, and even in our modern world, where the masses affect change, often in a big way.
Residents here are lucky in that King council is so receptive, and welcoming. While there are rules at council and public meetings, local politicians grant residents a lot of leeway when it comes to speaking their minds and voicing their opinions. They have created an atmosphere that fosters input and critique. It welcomes citizen feedback, regardless of its content.
And often, it takes just one voice, one family, to set those bureaucratic wheels in motion.
While it's not uncommon for municipalities to send letters and comment on provincial and federal policies, it's not often local politicians take up a crusade. But King made an exception recently, after Mayor Pellegrini and Councillor Bill Cober met with the Lehtinen family of Schomberg. Their son has fallen victim to cuts made by the Province to autism therapy programs. So they asked King to send a strongly worded motion to Queen's Park, saying they opposed these cuts and they stand united with families like the Lehtinens.
This one example of how democracy works, and why it was created in the first place.
King's plea may fall on deaf ears, but you never know. If enough municipalities flex their collective muscles, something may change, for the better.
It may sound cliche, but every movement starts with a single first step.
If that step begins with a seat on the Buddy Bench and ends with more funding for families and children, that's simply awesome.
Don't be shy. Take that first step!