

## The value of volunteers



By Nate Smelle

A COUPLE OF WEEKS AGO I asked question, ?where would we be without our volunteers??

Every week I spend wandering about the community discussing this community's past, present and future with people it becomes more apparent how grand the contribution of our volunteers truly is. Whether hanging artwork on the walls of the Art Gallery of Bancroft or organizing the annual Mud Dawgs event in Maynooth, it is important for us not to underestimate the value of volunteers.

Anyone residing in Bancroft, Hastings Highlands or the surrounding area during the spring flooding of 2013 knows how valuable such selfless individuals are in times of crisis. With many of these same volunteers offering their time and energy in service to the community on a day-to-day basis, it is the worth of this work that often goes unnoticed.

Every year Maynooth and Hastings Highlands business Association's (MHHBA's) Citizen of the Year award brings together communally concerned comrades in commerce to celebrate the contribution of one or more of their colleagues. The event always has a festive feel to it, and was aptly described this here by Sean Cassidy, the membership chair of the MHHBA, as a social networking event.

Nowadays when people use the words social network they are often referring to their friends and associates on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. The followers they have on these platforms are not necessarily people they know in real life, and with things like [socialfollow](#) they might have hundreds or thousands of these followers. Indeed communicating with one another through these channels connects people more closely on some levels, it does not, however, create as deep of a connection as when we gather our social network together in person. These type of gatherings help us get to know each other better as people rather than just profile pictures.

Likewise to how an employer expresses gratitude for their employees' hard work throughout the year in the form of a Christmas bonus or party, the MHHBA takes the time to show its members that their service to the community is appreciated. It also honours the unpaid work of the community's volunteers as meaningful.

Measuring the wealth of a community without taking into consideration the value of the social capital it and every community possesses makes as much sense as calculating the value of the tree without taking into consideration the value of the oxygen and the soil it helps to create.