

## Wollaston reeve reviews 2016

Wollaston Township has experienced a year filled with challenges, compassion and community.

Residents and our council are working hard to resolve the challenges. But it will take time, communication and good faith.

Volunteers are the driving force behind any rural community. Wollaston Township is no exception. But over the past year, many of those volunteers have felt immense stress due to insensitive comments made on social media and other venues.

Armchair critics aren't limited to our township. Many of us have watched social media turning into a soapbox with few rules. This year, the intensity and insensitivity was too much for some of our most experienced and passionate volunteers. Several have said they will no longer participate in light of ? not just the unfounded criticism ? but how and where the criticism occurred.

There's no getting around it. Losing volunteers hurts. And it is a barometer for cohesion and caring. The rise and quick demise of a local chapter of the Optimist Club is a case in point.

So is the loss of senior volunteer firefighters.

After a house fire in late 2015 resulting in a total loss, our community was devastated once again by fire ? this time a double house fire in the late spring of 2016 also resulting in a total loss. In the wake of these fires, our volunteer fire department and its leadership received negative and critical comments. A few local ?armchair firefighters? decided that our selfless firefighting volunteers had not done a good enough job. In fact, they were doing their best with tools they had. These events are very hard on a small community. I believe volunteers need to be encouraged and given constructive comment rather than criticism and negativity sent anonymously. Using social media constructively is a lesson that our children are being taught in schools where bullying is no longer tolerated ? our community members should be taking note.

But it isn't all negative. Compassion is also alive and well. The community came together following these fires with benefit fundraisers for the families suffering the losses. And many residents have urged our community to explore ways to connect online and off - in a helpful and positive way.

We do have a wonderful and caring community and I am hopeful we can continue to nourish that spirit.

I experienced that compassion first hand when I took a brief leave of absence from my municipal duties because of my struggle with alcohol. It is a one-day-at-a-time journey that has strengthened my belief in the importance of a healthy, supportive community.

I believe that Wollaston Township is on a path to good things in 2017. One of the first acts of the new year has been the formation of a new library. The municipality and Coe Hill community are excited about the project which has been spearheaded by enthusiastic volunteers. These residents want to maximize the potential of a rural library as a community hub ? for our families, small businesses, and seniors.

We plan to create a more comfortable environment for our volunteer firefighters although we are certainly saddened by the recent resignations of some very experienced members.

We've hired an event co-ordinator to help attract visitors to our area and with Canada's 150th, I'm sure we will see some special celebrations for residents and tourists.

Rural communities have an important role to play in the health and economy of our province and our country. It is a privilege to serve as reeve in a community with the potential that Wollaston Township has shown.

I wish you all the best for 2017.

*Submitted by Reeve Graham Blair*