

To cancel or not to cancel? Groups face tough decisions



April 23, 2020 By **Michael Riley** Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Local community groups such as the Hastings and Prince Edward County District School Board, the Bancroft Area Stewardship Council and the North Hastings Community Trust are having to make hard choices whether to cancel programming, services and events over the next few weeks and even months. Bancroft This Week found out which events these organizations have cancelled, what is still running, and what kinds of issues they are going through to reach these tough decisions.

HPE District School Board

Kerry Donnell is the communications manager with the Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board.

?In terms of events and other activities being cancelled; all school-related activities are not happening, with the exception of at-home learning. Having said that, we know that students and families are experiencing higher anxiety levels than normal. For that reason, school social workers are available to talk with high school students over the telephone. Families are encouraged to contact their child's principal to find out the services available to support students.?

Ken Dostaler, the superintendent for North Hastings schools, feels that while there has been a tremendous amount of effort expended to support families, there is still more to do.

?Our senior team is checking in weekly with school administrators to get updates about connecting with families. We talk about what to do if contact hasn't been made with all students and their families. We want to hear from families who are experiencing challenges or need additional supports. If homes cannot access e-learning, they should contact their child's school principal right away. Nothing can replicate the in-school experiences we offer students, but we will do whatever we can to help our northern families during these challenging times.?

Sean Monteith, the school board's director of education, adds that even with the pandemic-related cancellations and challenges, kids always remain the top priority.

?The last thing our families need is an additional stressor by feeling that their children are not keeping up, or have concerns about marks. I ask ? both as a teacher myself and as a father ? for all of us to do the best we can to be reasonable and understand that every

one of us is working in very challenging environments. We must never lose perspective that our kids need us to be there for them, now more than ever.?

Bancroft Area Stewardship Council

Ian Hendry is with the Bancroft Area Stewardship Council, a group whose aim is to engage, educate and empower our community through the management, protection and preservation of our environment.

?Yes, these are challenging times indeed. BASC was planning our first ever Environmental Summit to be held at Algonquin Park on April 4 this year, but we had to postpone it to a future date yet to be determined. Also, our Wonders of Wetlands Day, which is held semi-annually at Joy Bible Camp, and draws hundreds of local public-school students had to be cancelled due to the pandemic.?

In addition to his role at the BASC, Hendry also sits on the board of the North Hastings Community Fish Hatchery as a director.

?We withdrew from participating in the Belleville Sportsmen Show, which ran from March 13 to 15 as a precaution. We also had to cancel our annual Open House which was scheduled to take place on April 11. It's not clear at this time what will happen with our annual Fish and Pig Roast Dinner which is scheduled for July 18. This is where the vast majority of our annual revenue is raised.?

Amid all the cancellations, there is some good news however.

?Fortunately, we will be going ahead with our annual Tree and Shrub Program this year. With close to 10,000 trees and shrubs that were pre-ordered in November 2019 we have plans in place to assemble the orders with a minimum number of volunteers participating, and we will be taking all of the precautions such as personal distancing and wearing personal protective equipment. The orders will be picked up on Saturday, May 9 in a no contact environment. Also, we plan to go ahead with our Shoreline Rehabilitation Contest on May 11 at Baptiste Lake. Again, this will be done in a safe manner with personal distancing taking place and a minimum of volunteers.?

The BASC held its first ever virtual monthly board meeting in March, and according to Hendry, they plan to continue with this new tradition until they deem it safe to go back to in person meetings.

?This is a very difficult time for all of us, and I'm sure this is the case for all local not for profit organizations. The health and safety of our volunteers is, and always will be a priority.?

North Hastings Community Trust

The North Hastings Community Trust is a small community-based not-for-profit organization addressing poverty and injustice in Bancroft and the surrounding area. They receive the majority of their funding through the United Way and the County of Hastings. Since 2003, they have provided emergency financial relief to individuals and families living in poverty in North Hastings. From 2015 onward, they've expanded their mandate to include Harvest the North community gardens, as well as several other initiatives.

Jane Kali is the executive director with the NHCT.

?Yes, we have been really busy, but also thinking about gardens and food! We are fortunate here to have lots of space and a later start to our growing season.?

They are currently assessing their options for any events held later on this summer and beyond. With the Ontario government's omission of community gardens on its list of essential services, that has left the NHCT in a tight spot. To that end, they signed on Sustain Ontario's movement to ensure that community gardens are recognized as an essential service by the provincial government. They have penned an open letter to the Ford government to convince them to add community gardens to the essential service list. By the morning of April 17 it had nearly 6,400 signatures. They are hopeful that their efforts will result in community gardens being

deemed a necessity.

?Growing food remains essential,? says Kali, ?food sovereignty is even more important at this time!?