

Winter weather brings out summer planning for Wollaston youth



By Jim Eadie

Just as we pass through the coldest snap of the winter, in Wollaston Township plans are already being hatched for what will be the third annual Wollaston Young Stewards Environmental Camp for the summer of 2015. The camp is a remarkable collaboration of volunteer citizens and community organizations, local businesses, municipal government, conservation groups, the Wollaston Lake Home and Cottage Association (WLHCA) and Camp Kawartha. Forty local and seasonal youth are given a one-week day camp inspiring an appreciation of the outdoors and environmental stewardship while building self-esteem, confidence, and community.

“It is important to us that this opportunity is accessible to any young person in our township,” said Richard Clark, president of WLHCA and member of the Wollaston Township recreation committee. It costs approximately \$6,000 to put on the camp for two weeks, keeping it available to any youth at no cost, regardless of their circumstances.

“The first year, we received a one time grant from Cottage Life Magazine,” said Clark. “Now we have to find the money within the community.”

Two donors have come forward so far; Kawartha Community Credit Union has committed \$1,500, and the Township of Wollaston at their Dec 1 regular council meeting committed \$3,000 to the project, putting enough money in the bank to proceed with serious planning. Clark expects there will be other donors who will make up the shortfall before summer.

“There are a lot of benefits from this camp for our community and our children,” said Clark. “It develops a love for outdoor learning. There are lots of things to explore right outside our own back door. It also fosters new friendships between local and seasonal kids in the community. Camp Kawartha provides a very high quality learning experience, which is really sound and well put together. There are lasting memories for our kids, and I think it turns on a light bulb for their future. This camp is really precious for a lot of people here.”

New activities are added each year, and this year will be no exception. Clark is looking at potentially collaborating with the Nutwood Observatory and the Crowe Valley Conservation Authority, possibly developing some type of “junior science” including an actual research activity. Also on his list of ideas: woodlot management and tree identification, and aboriginal links.

Wollaston Township Deputy Reeve and camp volunteer Marilyn Brickles had nothing but praise for Clark, and the Camp Kawartha staff. “The kids had a great time, and so did I,” she said. “It’s a great camp.”

?This camp is important, because the environment is important,? said Anne Ireland, another camp volunteer.

?That's why we live up here. The awareness raised fits perfectly for our next generation. I see the children's curiosity and love of the outdoors, their enthusiasm ? they are like sponges soaking it all up. Neil Fortin talks about whatever they have found on their trail hike that day, or whatever is on their minds. I really like it that about half the youth are local, and half are seasonal. They get along beautifully ?. even though their life and school experiences may be different, I see them becoming good friends.?

Fortin is the head of outdoor education at Camp Kawartha, and he partners with Jacob Rodenburg, the Camp Kawartha executive director for the two weeks.

Camp Kawartha is the winner of eleven national and international awards for their work inspiring youth outdoor environmental stewardship.

The WLHCA web site states they are devoted to ?perpetuating the pristine environment and crystal waters in and around Wollaston Lake.?

Along with other community volunteers and supporters, Clark has assembled a remarkable project team that just seems to get better every year.

Camp registration packages will be available by the beginning of February. For further information, registration package, or to donate money contact the Wollaston Township office at 613-337-5731.