

Port Colborne working to become a Safe Community

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PORT COLBORNE — The city wants to become a safe community. It doesn't want to be known as a community whose rate of injury was higher than the provincial average.

Safe Communities Port Colborne was formed last year to reduce the risk for preventable injuries and provide a community culture of safety and well-being.

Fire Chief Tom Cartwright and Lori Kleinsmith of the Port Colborne/Wainfleet Healthy Lifestyles Coalition are co-chairing the committee.

"It's about creating a culture. We want safety to be a big part of our community," Kleinsmith said.

The idea of becoming a safe community stems from a presentation by Barry King, a consultant with Safe Communities Canada who introduced a pilot project for a community-based injury prevention initiative with the Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion in partnership with Safe Communities Canada.

A recent leadership table meeting was held where more than 35 community members provided input on specific areas requiring attention. The top three injury priorities: vehicle, intentional harm and falls.

Each are being addressed by a Safe Communities subcommittee, with support of organizations and businesses.

Safe Communities recently held a drawing contest to increase the committee's visibility. In the coming months, it will put forth a falls prevention brochure, a bicycle safety awareness campaign and other activities and projects aimed at educating the public about safety and preventing injuries.

"The vehicle subcommittee was struck with the goal to address and reduce vehicle-related accidents within the community," said Niagara Regional Police Insp. Des Carter, who is turning his duties over to new Port Colborne Staff Sgt. Joe Garvey.

"Information from the NRPS database showed that Port Colborne has fewer fatalities per capita than the comparison communities of Grimsby and Fort Erie. However, Port Colborne does have a similar number of personal injuries occurring from motor vehicle collisions when compared to Fort Erie," he said.

The greatest number of accidents and ticketable offences are caused by males 16 to 24 years old. Most impaired drivers are between the age of 35 and 44 years. Females were also represented, but on a smaller scale than males.

To help lower these numbers and keep the community safe, four priorities were set and include:

- Creating a youth communication plan to raise awareness on the impacts of excessive speed and aggressive driving by youth;
- Establishing a Think of Me education and enforcement strategy to remind drivers of their safety obligations.
- Road safety will be examined by the region through a road engineering study of Elm St. where it intersects Main and Killaly Sts. These two intersections have the highest number of collisions in Port Colborne. A community safety zone may also be implemented at Hwy. 58 and Omer Ave. due to high traffic speeds;
- The last objective is a bicycle safety campaign which is set to begin in March. NRP officers will tour Port Colborne schools to discuss bicycle safety with youths. To emphasize the importance of this, youths who are seen obeying traffic signals, wearing helmets and practising safe road rules will be rewarded with a coupon for a treat at a local restaurant.

All the initiatives will begin rolling out in spring and will continue throughout summer.

The Safe Communities intentional harm subcommittee tackles self harm, interpersonal harm, work, school and physical harm incurred in the home.

Intentional harm was identified as the second highest safety and injury prevention priority during the priority setting exercises.

“There is much work to be done in this area,” Kleinsmith said. “Port Colborne residents do not have easy access to mental health services, such as counselling, as many of these services are located in other parts of the region.”

To help address this, the committee is planning community awareness campaigns to help access services and touch on the reasons youths don’t often seek help when it’s needed.

“The youth will then determine solutions they would like to create to address these issues — it may be through multimedia, presentations, displays, etc., and community partners will be called upon to support and promote their projects,” she said.

“I’ve fallen and I can’t get up.”

They’re dreaded words no child or grandchild wants to hear from their loved one on the other side of the phone line.

“Our committee’s research shows that falls in older adults tend to result in much longer hospital stays and premature admission to extended care facilities,” said falls subcommittee chair Joy Misztal, who is also the administrator of Niagara Region’s Northland Pointe long-term care home.

With Port's large elderly population, the committee will focus on a number of safety and injury prevention initiatives including a fall prevention brochure to be distributed to Port residents in the spring.

Another project aimed at helping seniors will be a safety net, where apartment superintendents will keep an eye out for tenants. Each tenant will be asked to place a brightly coloured knitted cover on their door knob at night and will be asked to remove it in the morning to ensure they are OK. If the cover remains on the door, the superintendent will be called in to check on the resident.

The idea stems from an incident in Toronto where two seniors died in an apartment building but weren't found until months later.

With the subcommittees in place and support from the city, what began as a project in April 2008 will come to fruition April 9 when Port Colborne is designated a Safe Community. A ceremony will be held at Roselawn Centre at 1 p.m. with numerous invited guests, agencies who have been and would like to get involved and Paul Kells, the founder of Safe Communities will also present a safe community key to Port Colborne.

Article ID# 1466962