

Making Welland safer

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The Welland Safe Community Partnership business plan is in the mail.

The initiative was launched last year soon after Mayor Damian Goulbourne came to office. Since then, businesses, agencies, civic leaders and citizens have come together to find ways to make Welland a safer community.

The business plan must now be approved by the Safe Communities Foundation, a national organization structured on a World Health Organization model.

Chair Pat Chiocchio got involved because of what he was hearing from voters when he ran in Ward 1 in the last municipal election. He said the strategy deals with everything from workplace safety to making the community a safer place for children to play.

He anticipates the business plan will be approved by next February and programs now on the drawing board will be rolled out early next year.

Chiocchio said there may be "seed money" available to fund programs once the plan is approved.

Currently the group is working without a budget and relies heavily on volunteers.

On Dec. 8, the Welland Safe Community Partnership plans to set up a radar message board on Quaker Road to educate drivers who are passing through the school zone. The radar message board is being loaned to the group so they can address neighbourhood concerns about speeding.

This is just one way the partnership hopes to create a safer Welland.

Chiocchio stressed the need for volunteers who are willing to donate their time and in-kind services to propel the initiative along.

"We have tried to set goals that are achievable," Chiocchio said in reference to the business plan. "We're trying to make Welland the safest place to live, work and play."

In an effort to spread the safety message in Welland, the group will be launching education programs aimed at students entering the workplace.

One such initiative is the Passport to Safety program, which is aimed at

Grade 11 students.

The Safe Communities Foundation was founded in 1996 by Paul Kells. It was in response to an industrial accident that killed his son, Sean, in 1994.

The mission of the Safe Communities Foundation is to help people come together in the community to create a sense of awareness, understanding, support and leadership to implement effective, local programs to eliminate injuries and suffering.

Chiocchio said Welland is the only municipality in the region that is submitting a business plan with the Safe Communities Foundation.

The group hopes to serve as an example for other cities in Niagara, Chiocchio added.

To date, there are about 40 people who serve on a variety of Welland Safe Community Partnership subcommittees; but Chiocchio said there is a need for more on-the-ground workers.

"This is something I would like to see continue for years and years," he said.

Those interested in getting involved can call 905-735-1700, ext. 239.