

'Push For Change' rolls into town with students and OPP

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11/17/2016

By Heather Walters



Joe Roberts high fives students as they gather to hear his story and message in the parking lot of Mac's Convenience store.

WHEN Joe Roberts rolls into town, it's a big event.

Joe and his wife, Marie, walked into town pushing a shopping cart last Thursday escorted by several hundred school children and the Ontario Provincial Police. They had departed from Waterford in the early morning hours. Joe Roberts has been walking for a long time. He began his epic journey of 9000 kilometres across Canada on May 1 in St. John's, Newfoundland and will complete his journey in Vancouver, British Columbia on September 30, 2017. He reached the 3,700 kilometre point in Port Dover. His goal is to connect with kids every step of the way visiting over 400 schools en route.

In a moving address outside Mac's Convenience on Main Street he recounted how very early on in his life he met with some very tough challenges.

"I was homeless at 15 due to family conflicts. I was completely unprepared to take care of myself, got in trouble, made some bad choices and was destitute, doing drugs and living under a bridge at 19," he said.

"Luckily for me, I had a mom that wouldn't give up on me and I met the one person that finally got through to me. It was an OPP officer and he literally saved my life. I'm here today because he took the time to care. I got clean and vowed that someday I would pay it forward."

"I want to help develop a system that provides better support for troubled kids in need. I'm not a runner like Terry Fox, but, hey, I can walk, so I decided to do just that. I'm walking across Canada talking to kids in every town about options and I am partnering with the OPP in Ontario to help encourage a positive relationship between our youth and the police."

The OPP and Mac's have teamed up with Joe Roberts, launching an initiative called Operation Heat.

“This is a positive ticketing campaign,” stated Sergeant Avery Bassett “that helps reinforce positive community actions. If an officer observes a young citizen doing a kind thing, however small, or performing a positive civic duty (even just picking up garbage and depositing it in a can) they will be rewarded with a ‘ticket’ — redeemable for a free hot chocolate at any Mac’s location.”

She went on to say “we are using this program to build trust with youth who are often nervous to talk with police officers. That’s why our initiative clicked so well with Joe Robert’s important message.”

In closing, Joe Roberts told the assembled students “I hope you never have a crisis in your life, but if you do, I hope someone is smart enough and cares enough, to call the police.”



Students from St. Cecilia’s School pushed their own grocery cart down Main Street Thursday morning, full of items the students had gathered intended for the needy. They presented the donated goods to Joe Roberts in the parking lot of Mac’s Convenience on Main Street.