



United Way of York Region

33rd Annual General Meeting: June 25, 2009 Remarks by: Daniele Zanotti, CEO

He told me, “Come to the backyard. Un espresso, a nice sandwich with tomato and we can talk.” He always feels the need to insert nice before everything.



My neighbour: the voice of a thousand cigarettes, the host of all the important community meetings – what should we do about the 17 storey condo at Kipling and 7 - in his garage on nice stools from 1970 and old purpled barrels of wine with “Volare” all static in the background on CHIN FM.

And now, he asks me “....che?” Italian for “wasssssssssssssup?”

And I tell him of United Way; well as much as I can explain to him about what we do and how we do it. I said the first year we were together, in 2007, at our annual meeting, we talked about coming home, of roaring for the strength and sorrow of the people we serve, talking about mental health and abuse and homelessness and...

“Like a nice lion?” he says.

And then in 2008, at the annual meeting in the Heintzman House, we talked about Moscardelli.

“Moscardelli?” he says, “the nice poeta italiano?”

...and they met, in that little house in the field, white, historic,...and they told stories, promised to listen...

Our 2008 Moscardelli year: United Way listening, and we listened.

And he asks me “....che?” Italian for “...soooooo what did you hear?”

I tell him about our report, released in the middle of an open field in Richmond Hill, to talk about how much York Region is growing and changing and that we need to make sure people have help when they need it close to home. I tell him about a survey of 350 people, thanks to The Nielsen Company and groups and panels...



“Good, ya, ..” as he drags on his cigarette, “...all important, but when you walk around with your stupid shoes...



(he really does not like my shoes)

and that nice dog (he really doesn't like Theo either, but...he entertains him)...every night you walk around and around and around...you go to work...you talk....you talk...tell me about the people you meet.”



Kayla, an able teen in a wheelchair; at first, lonely and isolated in Georgina, she goes to Jericho Youth Services, a United Way funded program. There, she meets friends, gains confidence. Everyone should have a Jericho in their neighbourhood, she says.

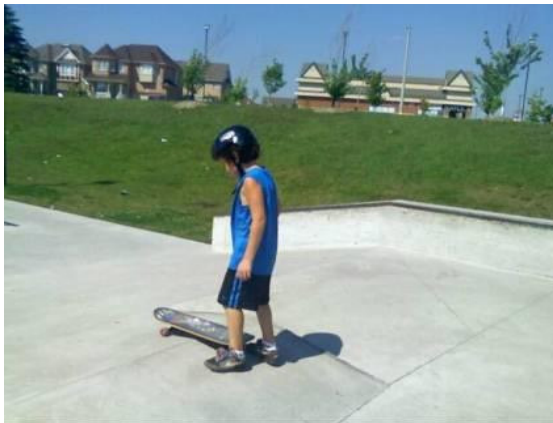
The kids under the bridge in the “bridge” - Woodbridge. The kids that live around our streets – good normal kids. They spray painted the walls, the police came, the city cleaned the walls, they spray painted the walls, the police came, the city cleaned the walls.

“...we are bored, looking for a place to hang,” they said as they walked home with me: one is a great student, one a talented musician, another a wicked artist.



The 7:30 am assembly at Pickering College - still gives me the chills. I talk to the students, our future leaders, about helping people in need – across the world yes, but in your neighbourhood too. I tell them about struggles with mental health, abuse, poverty...in their neighbourhood.

And a student, Nick, starts singing the Sesame Street song, quietly, until others join in, "...these are the people in your neighbourhood, they're the people that you meet when you are walking down the street...." Youth wanting to do good, to connect.



Skateboarding at Vellore Village with my son Noah. A little girl, Julia, and her dad walk in, and because I have "talk to me" written on my humongous forehead, he tells me he lost his job at Progressive Moulded Products, he has a mortgage to pay, his wife is working two jobs. He starts to cry. I put my hand on his shoulder. Noah wipes out showboating on his skateboard. Julia skates over and helps him up. She puts her hand on his shoulder.

Just before a campaign kick off, in a room at a local company, full of staff and colleagues talking and laughing, Constantin, our client speaker turns and says, "Near the end, when the cancer, mortgage, divorce, addiction ...everything collided...the only thing that kept me going was a job. When I lost that, everything came undone and I broke down. Now, after help from all United Way funded services, I am working again. It gives me purpose, money, focus."



Stuart, or to his friends, Stu-dog. He learned to read and write at a United Way funded agency, Community Living, works at Starbucks now. Stu-dog uses the money he earns at work to buy little gifts for his girlfriend Beth. Making money makes Stu-dog whole, he says. His smile melts me.

Tom the Barber Shop, sandwiched on Market Lane in Vaughan: a planned condo to the right, to the left, behind. "People need this place" says John, as he walks in for a blade 2 shave. "We come here to talk. It's the best unfunded United Way program you have, Zanotti." And he laughs. "This is where people meet, talk about soccer, who to vote for....oh, and to get their hair cut too."



And my neighbour asks me, "...che? Italian for, "...soooo, what did you hear?"

I repeat what our research over 2008 so clearly and simply says.

We want our youth to grow up strong. We want to have jobs, good jobs, to provide for our loved ones. We want to live in strong neighbourhoods.

"Here is what I hear," he says. "I hear people want and need to meet. I hear people want to belong, want to be connected – youth, people in transition, residents. Why do you come here face to face? Why you no she-mail me?" (He means email). "You come here because people...we need to meet."



"We get to know each other and the place by all the little things we do – I help with your flowers or the fence because you really don't know what you are doing, you help me make the vino."

"We are who we are with....and where we are with them. This is what makes nice cities."

And I ask him, "...che?" Italian for, "...where in sweet faggioli beans did that come from?"

He tells me to get on his scooter. He drives me along Kipling, north past Hwy. 7, down a hill, and I am holding onto this 87 year old chain smoking Mario Andretti tighter than a rollercoaster ride at Wonderland.

And he comes to a halt and says, "This is what I hear people need. This is what United Way must be."

"When you get together in 2009, you bring them to Vaughan, Le Parc, nice hall, all my kids got married there...best wedding drapes and decorations..."

"You say, we promised to listen to the neighbourhoods across the region. We promised to begin identifying and understanding the issues the community cares about deeply.....and we are: helping our youth to grow up strong; supporting people achieve economic independence; building strong neighbourhoods."



Yes, yes, yes...And we heard. If necessary, services, but not services necessarily.

Because United Way heard York Region residents want more. A meeting house with rooms for all: residents, business, faith, agencies, labour. Because meeting brings people together, gets them talking, builds solutions, connects to a common good for all. This is what makes a living neighbourhood... if necessary, services. Not services necessarily. But definitely, definitely people involved in the issues they care about – volunteering, raising awareness, leading policy change.”

My friends, if 2007 was our roar year, 2008 our Moscardelli listen year, let 2009 be our Meeting House year: the evolution of United Way to the meeting house for the dialogue and action on issues the community cares about.

Here is how we will map this out over 2009:

During United Way week, we will release a follow-up to what the Star dubbed “a most provocative” **...if addressed**. report: what promises to be our most evocative report to date, mapping out what this bold old meeting house must look like going forward.

In October, our Board will approve our new funding priorities, with outcomes and evaluation measures thereafter, capturing the realities and wisdom gathered over 2008.

In December, we will approve our new strategic plan, a process well underway, gathering the voices and wisdom from King to Markham, Richmond Hill to Georgina and everywhere in between.

And we will make listening, meeting and engaging part of what we do everyday, not every 5 years, beginning with the residents and groups impacted by our funding priorities.

And, let us never forget, our sine qua non, a most aggressive 2009 campaign goal in a year when no one, absolutely no one, needs to be told why.

And when we meet next year, at this same meeting, at some other symbolic and tough to find location, we will speak of our successes: a record campaign, a bold Board willing to listen and engage, tireless and oh so bright volunteers, a staff that bleeds United Way pantone red for the people we serve, agencies caring and consoling and empowering on the ground.

And we will map out outcomes and measurements for the issues we heard you care about - helping youth grow up strong, supporting residents achieve economic independence, building strong neighbourhoods.

And we will begin to live in our bold old home again: United Way as the meeting house. United Way creating the ongoing spaces and places, the community pipeline where people come together, build and find solutions, effect change on critical social issues. United Way as a catalyst for increased resident involvement on addressing social issues at all levels – program, awareness, policy.

My friends, I am so proud we are making our way home. I hear this is where York region residents want and need us to be.

I remain humbled and honoured to serve.