

## **Innisfil Scope – August 12-2009**

### **County starts school alliance**

County of Simcoe warden Tony Guergis is a founding member of the Community Schools Alliance.

This new alliance will spearhead efforts to have municipalities become partners with school boards in making decisions about where facilities are built and closed.

"I am honoured and pleased to be a part of this initiative working together for the betterment of education for all residents of Ontario," said Guergis. "There is a strong need for municipal leaders to get involved and to work in cooperation with local school boards. Our schools are important assets in our public infrastructure and we believe that municipalities, parents and students should have a strong voice at the table where accommodation decisions are made."

The alliance, chaired by South West Middlesex mayor and former president of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario Doug Reycraft, is asking the Ontario government to impose a 'smart moratorium' on school closings. The moratorium would enable the Ministry of Education, boards and municipalities to work together to develop policies addressing such issues as declining enrolments, funding for rural and small community schools and the development of better working relationship.

"I have worked with Reycraft in the past and have tremendous respect for his abilities. I look forward to his leadership in respect to this issue," said Guergis.

The alliance was formed by municipalities concerned about having an active role in the process used by school boards to make decisions about student accommodation and closures. There are currently 100 schools in Ontario undergoing accommodation reviews and 146 schools that have been recommended for closure.

"As a member of the alliance, the county has a tremendous opportunity to be involved in this important process and to be at the table when the discussions take place and decisions are made," said Guergis. "Residents in many county communities including Springwater, Barrie, Clearview, Penetanguishene and Wasaga Beach have education delivery concerns. There are challenges with the current process. By working together with the alliance, we can resolve these issues."

In addition to his role on the alliance, Guergis will continue to work with the Simcoe County District School Board to address provincial funding inequities for education across the region. Board trustees have accepted the county's offer to form a working group and to request a review of funding levels.

"We are working together with our partners in order to bring recognition to funding issues from a regional perspective," said Guergis.

"The county has been consistently at the bottom of the provincial funding scale and we need to be addressing our concerns."