LANARK COUNTY

MEDIA RELEASE

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Warden proclaims National Access Awareness Week

Lanark County Council has approved a proclamation to declare May 27 to June 2 National Access Awareness Week.

"About 15 per cent of Ontario's 11 million residents have some form of disability, especially as they get older," said Warden John Gemmell (Perth Deputy Mayor). "National Access Awareness Week gives us an opportunity to raise awareness and understanding of this issue, and to recognize their needs, capabilities and potential."

National Access Awareness Week was first established in 1988 after Rick Hansen's "Man in Motion" Tour, which promoted better community access for people with disabilities. The week celebrates achievements made by and for people with disabilities, and is a chance to promote access for people with all disabilities who encounter barriers preventing them from full participation in daily activities.

The mission statement for the week is to challenge all Canadians to affect changes through community partnerships that result in equal access and full participation of people with disabilities in all aspects of Canadian life.

"People with disabilities often face obstacles that prevent them from working, travelling in and having full enjoyment in their communities," explained Pat Dolan, Montague Township Deputy Reeve and chair of the county's accessibility awareness sub-committee. "This can include seniors, too, who experience barriers to activities as part of the natural aging process, and we want to try to make things better. The county is working to meet its goal of becoming an accessible county by eliminating barriers to facilities, services and workplaces."

The sub-committee advises county council on how to make the corporation more accessible for people with disabilities and aims to remove any existing barriers over time and to prevent new ones from being created. It was developed as part of the Ontarians with Disabilities Act and its key role is to advise council regarding its annual accessibility plan in terms of reviewing site plans for new and existing municipal buildings, as well as checking bylaws, purchases, significant renovations, leased facilities, municipal capital facilities and goods and services provided by the municipalities. It liaises with local municipalities and other accessibility advisory committees and it monitors federal and provincial directives and regulations.

"There are many kinds of barriers out there," Mr. Dolan said. "Examples are doors that are too heavy for a person in a wheelchair to open or signs that are difficult to read for a person with a visual disability or telephones that a person who is hearing impaired cannot use."

"Lanark County Council and the people of Lanark County are committed to becoming an inclusive county in which all persons with disabilities can exercise their civil, political, social and cultural rights on an equal basis with other persons," Mr. Gemmell said as part of the proclamation. "We want to ensure that everyone has the right to live in conditions of dignity, respect and peace."

The accessibility advisory sub-committee meets every second month and its decisions are recommended to the county's corporate services committee and then to council. The sub-committee currently has a vacancy for a citizen volunteer. Anyone interested in becoming involved in this important community endeavour should contact Leslie Drynan, deputy clerk and committee secretariat, at 613-267-4200, ext. 1502.

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For more information, contact:
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