

A great example

“A community is like a ship; everyone ought to be prepared to take the helm.”
— Henrik Ibsen, Norwegian playwright, 1828-1906

Taking the helm doesn't always mean doing everything by yourself. But it does mean shouldering responsibility, taking action, forming partnerships. And the Keith neighbourhood has been willing to take the helm.

The new Robert Land Community Association made a successful bid to buy Robert Land School, which closed in 2004. The bid is supported by substantial financial contributions from a handful of donors.

When the school closed, an already barren, impoverished neighbourhood became more so. There were already no banks, no convenient bus routes, no community centre — the neighbourhood lost its community's hub when the 90-year-old school closed.

People react to bad news in a variety of ways. Some gripe and complain, some get angry. And some swing into action.

That initial action on the part of the new community association — bidding to purchase the school building — spawned action from another community member, Mohawk College.

The college has adopted Robert Land School. As many as 50 of its best students will help Keith residents through three projects: renovating classrooms; developing and delivering recreation programs with the YM-CA, and raising the centre's profile through marketing, advertising and public relations. Long-term, the community association sees the revitalized Robert Land School as a significant neighbourhood resource that would include a policing centre, a job bank, health-care services and legal aid, as well as recreational and social programs.

Mohawk College's involvement in this community-based project is an excellent example of what it means to be an active and purposeful part of our city's response to poverty and community-rebuilding. It's a sign of full engagement in the community in a meaningful, organic way that will have a huge long-term impact.

It's the kind of engagement that puts into action some of the principles articulated by the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, a joint effort of the Hamilton Community Foundation and the city.

Noble philosophy is a key stepping-off point for the creation of a broad strategy. We need the foundation provided by a set of well-articulated common beliefs and goals.

But we also need a community willing to get its hands dirty, to roll up its sleeves and actually build things. The Keith neighbourhood is willing to do that and so is Mohawk College. What a great example for the rest of us.

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