

Hello, it's nice to see you again.

I'd like to tell you about a recent event here at City Hall, one that filled me with optimism for the future.

More than 80 young HRM adults accepted an invitation to share their dreams and to brainstorm ways their generation could achieve more empowerment. It turned into a very productive evening.

We started with an "icebreaker" session and one of the questions asked was what bugged them about their school and their community. They came up with a very responsible list, the equal of any compiled by older adults.

These young people were bothered by litter and disturbed by selfishness and stereotyping. They were troubled about homelessness and concerned about safety on our streets. They also felt youth needed a greater voice in the world today, a theme that would repeat as the evening progressed.

After the ice was broken, the guests split into groups to discuss various topics, including: education; transportation; role models; and recreation.

I made the rounds and overheard a lot of imaginative ways by which the quality of life for HRM's youth might be improved.

For example, members of one group felt if we had more recreational outlets for youth, it would help keep them out of trouble. They suggested lowering fees for recreation programs and keeping the doors to our centres open later. They also put felt it would be

a good idea if young people actually created and controlled their own recreation programs.

Those discussing leadership voiced a need for more youth forums like this one. They also felt that, when decisions are being made that will have an impact on young people, they should be part of the process.

Meanwhile, the group examining the issue of education had a similar suggestion. Let students be part of the process, to give them a sense of control, of “ownership,” over their own education. As well, they said, what about trying an “open-ended” curriculum to encourage the learning process for students.

At one point, the group discussing role models made mention of a call-in line for troubled youth. Interestingly, that’s a service we already have in HRM, one which can act as a conduit to other assistance programs we offer or alerts us to ones we need to provide.

The role-model group also suggested compiling a list of successful citizens who would be willing to meet with local youth and inspire them.

My evening with these dozens of motivated, articulate young people was most instructive. I was there to listen and I learned a lot.

I look forward to continuing my dialogue with the youth of HRM.

The holiday season is gathering momentum and there’s a wonderful selection of entertainment being put on around metro by various community groups. If you’d like to

see a selection of these celebrations, log onto HRM's home web page www.halifax.ca and click on Events in The HRM. I think you'll be impressed.

And finally, I'd like to pay tribute to everyone involved in November's Pistols for Pixels program. This particular gun-amnesty was HRM's most successful ever.

Working in partnership with Halifax Regional Police, Henry's Camera offered digital cameras and gift certificates to anyone turning in firearms or ammunition.

At the end of the campaign, 1,074 weapons were handed over by public-spirited HRM residents, as were 10,000 rounds of ammunition. Those are remarkable statistics when you consider Toronto, which is almost 20 times our size, netted 1,900 weapons during a recent amnesty program.

I would like to thank each citizen who stepped forward and also to salute corporate sponsors, Henry's Camera and Sony Corp., whose help went a long way in making this a successful effort.

Our streets are that much safer today.

[] If you'd like to talk to me, reach me here at City Hall at kellyp@halifax.ca or by phoning 490-4010.