

Port Credit youth enters race for Peel Board trustee

By JASON SPENCER
Staff

At age 18, Stephen Warner can now legally buy lottery tickets, enter a casino and, among other things, run for public office.

For now, the Port Credit resident, a first-year political science student at the University of Toronto, is concentrating on the latter.

Last Friday, Warner dropped by City Hall to register for the Peel District School Board's Wards 1 and 7 trustee race. With the municipal election slated for Oct. 27, he's the only candidate at the moment. The seat is currently



Stephen Warner, 18, is running for Peel District School Board trustee in Wards 1 and 7. *Staff photo by Jason Spencer*

occupied by longtime Peel Board chair Janet McDougald.

"On the broader scale of things, I'm very passionate about making sure democracy runs, and part of that is looking at the inequalities of democracy (such as) the power of incumbency, the power of money (and) the power of influence," Warner said of his decision to run. "As we've seen on multiple levels of politics, you've got people who've been in for 10, 15, 20, 25 years, and there's really been no one to challenge them. I want to be that person to challenge the system."

Before dismissing Warner as an inexperienced go-getter who's in over his head, he already has that angle covered. In fact, his lack of experience is exactly why he's decided to file his nomination papers in hopes of effecting change with something he's most passionate about: education.

"I imagine that I will get a lot of comments like, 'You're too young' or 'What are you doing here?' But, to them, I would say, 'Who better to do these sort of things than someone who's young, been there, someone who knows.'

"In democracy...the best candidates are the ones to bring something new to the table," he continued. "... I do believe that my current perspective, having graduated from the system, gives me a very unique and important perspective for the Peel Board."

Warner's boots-on-the-ground experience at Port Credit Secondary School, where he received the Lux Numquam Desit Award for highest achievement at his graduation last June (the award, ironically, was presented by McDougald), informed his platform, which

consists of strengthening coordination and communication between Peel schools (especially with region-wide events), furthering the integration and utilization of technological resources such as the Board's Bring Your Own Device policy (which enables students to bring their own electronic devices into the classroom), doing more to address mental health issues, and standardizing of policies for students with physical disabilities.

The latter is a topic that Warner, who is visually impaired, feels strongly about.

"The public system is an amazing system for people living with a disability because it is an equalizer. It shows you the real world," he said, adding more could still be done across the region to improve staff resources.

Warner acknowledges that if McDougald puts her name on the ballot, it will be a David

versus Goliath scenario.

Noting the incumbent has a school named after her, he said, "If she runs, her name carries a lot of weight with it...she has been there longer than I've been alive."

"She knows the system very well, how things work, how the process works, how the Board functions and how to get things done."

That said, Warner hopes his firsthand knowledge of having gone through the public school system recently will give him an edge.

"I offer a unique experience that she does not have from being away from things for so long," he said.



Janet
McDougald