

Our police should be commended

ALTHOUGH WE WELCOME letters to the editor, even when the views they express do not coincide with our own, sometimes a letter calls out for editorial comment, and one found elsewhere on this page is a good example.

In the letter, writer Tom Lante asserts that a 'gay pride event' took place in Orangeville last Saturday and states (correctly) that Orangeville Police promoted it, in part by raising the multi-coloured Pride flag at police headquarters and having officers attend the event wearing pink shirts for the occasion.

The main tenet of the letter is that police should not take part in 'political activism' and should rather leave it to the activists themselves and sympathetic politicians.

Well, to us there's a world of difference between taking part in political activism and helping celebrate moves toward ending discrimination based on individuals' race, colour, creed, gender or sexual orientation.

As we see it, the actions of Orangeville Police should be welcomed by everyone in the community, and the novel idea of having officers wear pink shirts is something that could and should provide a solution next year when Toronto has its 39th annual Pride Parade.

As readers already know well, the Toronto Pride parade organizers have given in to demands by a truly activist group, Black Lives Matter, and refused to let members of the Toronto Police Service march in the parade if they are in uniform, and Premier-elect Doug Ford says he won't take part in future Pride parades unless the officers are welcomed back in full uniform.

It strikes us that even Black Lives Matter leaders might not oppose the idea of permitting pink-shirted officers to take part.

The letter from Mr. Lante goes on to assert that Orangeville Police officers would never be seen wearing shirts of other colours or raising a 'heterosexual' flag (if indeed there is one).

We're left wondering just how much he knows about the extent of discrimination members of the LGBTQ community have suffered, both historically and elsewhere in today's world.

We know that some Christians continue to oppose same-sex marriage on religious grounds, citing the apostle Paul's condemnation of homosexuality. But we've never seen any remark by Jesus Christ that set limits on his call for us to love one another and our neighbours as ourselves.

And while it's true that the main job of our police forces is to protect the community in which they serve, by enforcing our laws and investigating any breaches of the law, it's surely important to see officers participating in local events, particularly when the events celebrate some sort of progress.

As we understand it, the Celebrate Your Awesome event was open to every member of the community, and no attempt was being made to do more than celebrate the diversity permitted in today's Canada.

After all, unlike our neighbours to the south, Canadians have never seen their country as a 'melting pot' in which ultimately everyone seemingly would think and look alike. The challenge has always been to find ways of accommodating differences, be it between our anglophone and francophone populations or between our immigrants from Europe and other parts of the world and the indigenous people whose lands they have occupied.

Let's hope that Celebrate Your Awesome becomes an annual event locally, that the concept is picked up in other communities that haven't had Pride events, and that in those communities the local police will help promote recognition of the equality now found in Canadian society.

After all it was as recently as February 5, 1981 that Toronto police raided four bathhouses and arrested 286 men who were accused of engaging in 'indecent acts' because they happened to be gay.