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Going arm-to-arm in blood donor challenge

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Thursday will be a big day for local emergency services on Thursday, July 26th, 2012. That is because of some giving professional individuals who will be answering a siren call of a different kind, but which is hard to ignore.

Police, fire and paramedic services in Espanola and the North Shore, as well as Manitoulin Island and some Sudbury supporters, are going above and beyond the call of duty to rally behind this year's Sirens for Life blood donor challenge to donate blood and help save lives.

In partnership with Canadian Blood Services (CBS), the emergency services blood donor challenge runs from July 1 to Sept. 3 as the three branches compete to donate the most blood. The competition for bragging rights is friendly, but every police, fire or EMS worker knows the importance of blood.

For this year's challenge, the goal is to collect 100 units of blood in North/East Ontario and to increase the number of young, male, ethnically diverse registrants on the One Match Stem Cell and Marrow Network.

"The need for blood doesn't take a summer vacation, and paramedics, fire and police workers may know this more than most. That's one of the reasons these first responders are rallying together and rolling up their sleeves," says Joanne Drake, Community Development Coordinator at Canadian Blood Services. "They are on the frontline everyday and know lives can change in an instant. Anyone can need blood at anytime. It can take 50 units of blood to save someone who has been in a car accident and that means 50 donors are needed."

Sargeant Steve Edwards with the Espanola Police Service realizes the incomparable value of giving blood. He has been doing it for about ten years.

"I decided to start giving blood for a number of reasons; it is free, it is easy to do and I know it is helpful, it is a necessity," explained Edwards. "I plan to keep doing it as long as I can. It only takes an hour or so and having a blood bank is an absolute necessity. It is something people can do quite easily to help others and a very worthwhile cause."

Deputy Chief Glen Clifford with Manitoulin-Sudbury Emergency Medical Services (EMS) concurs.

"Every minute of every day, 365 days of the year, there is a need for blood, every minute! Today, EMS personnel from Northeastern Ontario invite everyone to help the region collect 100 units of blood by September 3rd," said Clifford. "With the summer vacation season upon us, the need for blood is even greater. However, also with the summer season, CBS is challenged to maintain the blood supply when the demand is at its highest.

"So today, we are teaming up with the people who see the need for blood first hand in our community every day. We are challenging each other, as services, to roll up their sleeves and give so others can live."

It is estimated that 20,000 pints of blood will be needed in Northeastern Ontario during the summer months.

It will be the first time for Marek Malinowski, a paramedic student to give blood.

"It is partially due to the challenge, but I also understand the need for blood," explained Malinowski. "I have just finished the first year of my program and have been here in Espanola on placement. Fellow students have given blood and now that the opportunity is presenting itself, I plan to help out.

"If I needed it, I would want to know it is there. After all, what goes around does comes around."

In last year's challenge, EMS personnel donated eight pints, fire, six, and local police, five.

The general public is also encouraged to take part in the clinic. It takes place at the Espanola Knights of Columbus Hall this Thursday, July 26th from 11:30 am until 2:30 pm and from 4:00 pm to 7:00 pm. Bring appropriate identification and take part in saving lives.

The Knights have been long-time supporters of the CBS and have provided the facility for local monthly blood donor clinics for several years.

For more information, visit www.bloodservices.ca or call 1-888-TO-DONATE, and answer the call.

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