



Halton Peel Humanist Community

Freethinking atheists inspired to Humanism

At the 2022 Annual Meeting last June 7, I was acclaimed as a Director, and as is the way for HPHC, I accepted the position of President at the first Board meeting of the year on June 14. In the same meeting we decided which Directors would fulfill the other portfolios and duties. We settled on George Cordahi as Vice President, Cameron Soltys in a dual role as Secretary & Events, Jerry Bakker at Membership, Kostas Tsembelis, Webmaster with two Members-at-Large, Mohammed Al-Naib and Kelly Bogart. I also continued in my role as Treasurer. I want to sincerely thank my fellow Directors for their service over the past year. Our Group of Seven met six times for Director's meetings and in between coordinated our efforts across numerous Signal threads. This is a very affable, flexible and diligent group of volunteers. Our meetings were always productive and enjoyable, especially on May 9th when we reveled in a gorgeous spring day on Kelly's patio with an impromptu potluck supper before getting down to business. An enticement to future Directors, perhaps? On behalf of the HPHC members and myself, thank you to this wonderful group of people for their efforts in 2022/23.

I want to give a special note of thanks to our long-time webmaster, Kostas Tsembelis. After several years of incremental updates to the HP-HC.ca site, Kostas took the bull by the horns and gave us a complete re-design in Wordpress that is sleek, up-to-date and easy to navigate. Though it has been up and operating for several weeks now, I take this opportunity now to declare the new home of HPHC officially launched and invite you to pay a visit, invite your friends and maybe renew your membership, if that's what's required.

Before the last Annual Meeting, the Director's met to review 2021/22. With our first in-person meeting scheduled in two years, Kostas issued us a challenge – to recapture what had been lost during the pandemic – the social side of our Community, which is the very thing that kept him coming back to HPHC year after year. Throughout 2020 and 2021, though we did our best to compete in the huge world of online events with some truly excellent speakers, the social side suffered. Kostas made the case for HPHC to return focus to our mission: to promote the Principles of Humanism through outreach and engaging social gatherings of Freethinkers in our Community.

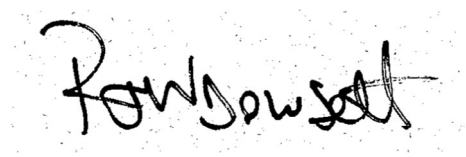
Starting in the summer of 2022, we took Kostas' message to heart by having twelve in-person meetings, half of those dedicated to socializing. These included Summer Fridays at the Stonehooker Brewery, Winter Solstice/Human Light at The Brogue and a members-only Garden Party at Kelly's. What's more, all *twelve* events were designed with ample opportunity for our members to interact and build community – the return of the Ancestor's Walk, Let's Talk about Humanism I and II at Symposium and Documentary Night on Street Epistemology, also at Stonehooker. Each of these events was well-attended by members and friends and contributed uniquely to the Halton Peel secular scene.

Starting in 2023, the Director's made another decision - a general commitment to host our events on the first Tuesday of every month, allowing our members to put aside that one day for an HPHC gathering and trusting the Community to arrange a series of worthwhile evenings. Tonight's event makes five in a row. I believe this to be a key to our event success, so I'll be looking for some feedback on this concept later during the discussion period.

While these strategy changes had many of the desired outcomes, one of the goals was not accomplished – a bump in paid membership. From the 2022 Annual Meeting until today, HPHC's member numbers declined 30% from 27 to 19. The majority of these were long-time members who had decided to move on but 3 were new members in 2022 who did not renew. Of the many guests who attended events over the past year, only one converted to paid membership. Though our financial position remains solid, as we will see when we review our Finances in the upcoming Treasurer's report, the new Board must address what changes to our events, programs and policies are necessary to increase the number of HPHC members and reap all the benefits that come with having a larger resource pool to draw from.

In last year's President's Message, I said how "we look forward to resuming a full calendar of purely social events where members can enjoy the company of like-minded people and put the COMMUNITY back in the Halton Peel Humanist Community". In 2022/23, we made this happen by creating a consistent schedule of engaging social events. Now I believe it's time to activate the "outreach" side of our mission statement and connect with the many, many residents of Halton Peel to whom the values of Secular Humanism will resonate. I call upon all of you to do your part to make this year a breakout year for your Humanist Community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard Dowsett". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Richard Dowsett
President HPHC 2022-23

(Delivered at 2023 Annual Meeting, June 6, 2023)