

Section III – Items for the Information of the Board

TO: Chair and Members of the Executive Committee
Friday, September 8, 2023 Meeting

FROM: Michael Tolensky, Chief Financial and Operating Officer

RE: **Q2 COMMUNICATIONS, MARKETING, AND EVENTS REPORT SUMMARY (APRIL 1 - JUNE 30, 2023)**

KEY ISSUE

Information report regarding Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) corporate media communication activities during the second quarter of 2023 (April 1 - June 30, 2023).

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT the Q2 Communications, Marketing and Events Report Summary for April 1 - June 30, 2023, be received.

BACKGROUND

The Communications, Marketing and Events (CME) business unit with involvement of program areas across TRCA's Divisions carry out corporate communications programs to provide TRCA with a unified voice that aligns consistently with strategic priorities, and monitors results to identify opportunities for improvements. Working with staff from all divisions and external program and service providers, the business units deliver communications campaigns through traditional media outlets and online social media channels. Content is typically disseminated through materials such as news releases and media advisories, direct outreach to targeted journalists, producers and editors, and responses to incoming media inquiries. Digital campaigns involve posting visual and written content on websites and distribution via social media platforms. All media activity is supported by ongoing assessment and deployment of technology tools and processes to maximize effectiveness.

OVERVIEW:

This report covers communications and marketing activities for TRCA between April 1 - June 30 , 2023, achieved by the Communications, Marketing and Events (CME) Team.

Q2 Successes

1. CME assisted with the execution of the Bruce's Mill Disc Golf Grand Opening event held on Saturday, June 3 by assisting with the communications that included social media, blog post, media release, online invitation and reservations, web page updates and development. In addition, numerous park operational signs were developed, including 18 Tee signs and a Disc Golf

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Welcome/Map sign. The design style for these signs will be carried over to the new course being constructed at Albion Hills.

2. CME highlighted TRCA's partnership with Avenza through the following promotions: Blog post – highlighting the use of Avenza on our trails, and how use the interactive maps and app; all Parks and Lands location pages were updated with individual QR codes to the downloadable trail maps; QR code signs were designed for 18 TRCA Parks and Lands locations; homepage banner was created to promote the ability to use Avenza app on our trails and will be used throughout the year.
3. CME executed a communications strategy to create awareness and drive attendance to TRCA Conservation Parks. Promotions include google ads, social media, newsletters, and TRCA billboard. Google ad campaign for parks resulted in 12,700 click-throughs to our website in June. Google grant ads for Q2 resulted in approximately \$119,000 of free ads, and 38,700 click-throughs.
4. CME assisted with the promotion of the TRCA Bird Festival at Tommy Thompson Park, held May 13, 2023, by assisting with communications that included social media and blog posts, a media release, online registration and all associated graphics and webpage updates.
5. CME assisted with the promotion of the opening of Black Creek Pioneer Village, by assisting with communications and advertising that included organic and paid (advertising) social media posts, development, and purchase of TTC advertisements, and the development and purchase of paid print ads through various publications.
6. CME assisted with the creation of branded marketing assets for TRCA's HR staff to give away at various job fairs, as well as providing key communications through social media promoting TRCA at job recruiting fairs and the purchase of online advertising and development of organic social media posts for overall job recruiting efforts for permanent and seasonal jobs.
7. CME supported Earth Day celebrations through a variety of content, including blogs highlighting TRCA's [Environmental Monitoring Tool](#) and [bat monitoring](#) activities, alongside daily social posts themed around the hashtag #Investinourplanet.

Key Q2 Communications Metrics

1. A total of **62** newsletter campaigns were issued with an average open rate (AOR) of **51.40%** and a click rate (CR) of **8.00%** which is above the benchmarks for the non-profit sector (25.17% AOR / 2.79% CR). These rates remained well above the total average for all industry standards (21.33% AOR / 2.62% CR).

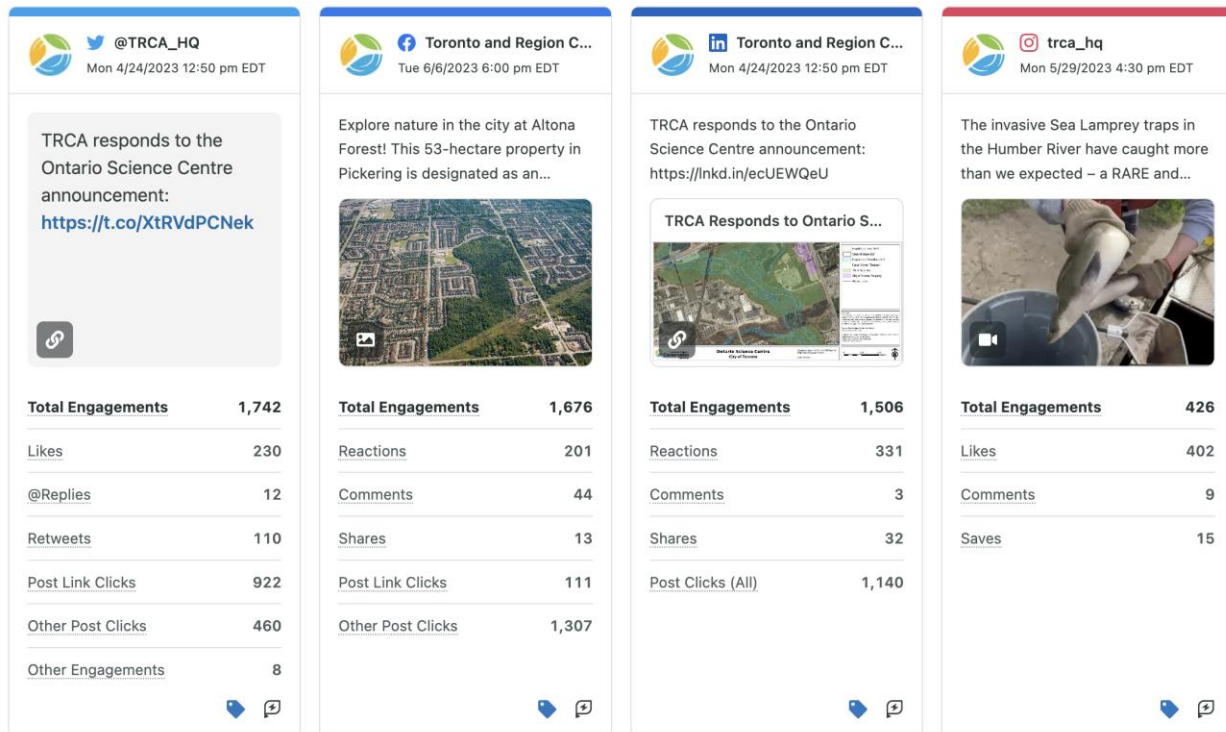
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- Social media audience growth rate was **3.7%** (50,171 to 52,043); Social media audience engagement increased **1.9%** with a total of **75,264** interactions with Facebook (38K) and LinkedIn (22K) receiving the highest engagements. A conservative effort to increase engagement each quarter is done by providing followers the opportunity to view more photos, ask for their feedback and incorporate more videos into our weekly posts. TRCA's Facebook account continues to account for the most direct link to www.trca.ca.
- Total traffic on www.trca.ca during Q2 2023 totaled **634,849** page views down (-1.4%) from Q2 2022. Various TRCA Parks and Activity pages, TRCA Events Calendar and TRCA Career and Seasonal Employment pages rank amongst the highest visited pages on www.trca.ca.

Q2 Social Activity

During Q2, 2023, our social media content focused on the promotion of events and "Things to Do" related to TRCA Parks, unique finds from our staff working in the field, the launch of disc golf at Bruce's Mill Conservation Park and government news and announcements. Noteworthy campaigns included the start of our Parks campaign which focusses on promoting our Conservation Parks and activities to enjoy this summer, promotion of this year's TRCA Spring Bird Festival at Tommy Thompson Park, and our Earth Week campaign, which included opportunities to get involved with community clean-ups and tree plantings across the GTA.

TRCA's top organic posts per social media account were as follows:



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1. The top **Facebook** post shown highlighted the Altona Forest, which performed well across all metrics, including “likes”, “comments”, “shares” and “link clicks”. This post is part of a series within our Parks campaign where we are showcasing our non-paid parks and areas that often don’t get highlighted on social media. This post likely performed well as the property may be new or feel like a “hidden gem” to many viewers who are unaware of Altona Forest.
2. The top **Instagram** post highlighted above was a Reel showing a rare and endangered American Eel fish, found by TRCA’s Monitoring team. Content that showcases wildlife, especially rare finds like this fish, tends to perform well, including high number of “likes” and “saves.” The content was also a video “Reel” post, proving again the popularity and effectiveness of short-form video content.
3. The top **Twitter** post showcased above received the highest engagements most likely due to the nature of the content; TRCA’s response to the Ontario Science Centre announcement. The post not only had a high number of "link clicks" to the full story on our website, but also received many "retweets" and "replies" from users within the Twitter thread.
4. As with Twitter, the top **LinkedIn** post highlighted above likely received the most engagements due to the nature of the content; TRCA’s response to the Ontario Science Centre announcement. The post accumulated high “post clicks”, including link clicks to read the full story on our website, along with high engagements through “reactions” to the post and “shares” to user’s personal feeds to spread the word further.

Q2 Events Summary

TRCA’s Events team provides strategic direction and assistance to all TRCA business units as required, to stage or participate in successful events, and takes the lead in managing signature TRCA events.

The Events team coordinated and implemented the following events in Q2.

Partner Announcement Support – Uxbridge Urban Provincial Park

TRCA is often called upon to attend and support various announcements from partners at all levels of government. On April 22, “Earth Day” TRCA in addition to hosting numerous community clean up and planting events across the GTA, supported the announcement of the province’s first urban provincial park in the Township of Uxbridge. CEO John MacKenzie provided a quote in support of the news release and attended the announcement alongside Minister David Piccini, TRCA Vice-Chair and Uxbridge Mayor Dave Barton, and TRCA Board Member and Mayor of Pickering, Kevin Ashe.

Canada Community Revitalization Fund (CCRF) Announcement – Petticoat Creek & Claremont Nature Centre

On April 16, at Petticoat Creek Conservation Park, Jennifer O’Connell, Member of Parliament for Pickering-Uxbridge, announced that over \$740,000 has been committed

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to the park, and \$320,000 to Claremont Nature Centre, as part of the Canada Community Revitalization Fund.

At Petticoat Creek, funded initiatives include adding 50 new picnic tables, two new picnic shelters and repairing two existing ones, and upgrading washrooms for accessibility. Two new wayfinding kiosks with accessibility information will be installed to enhance the experience on park trails, and park access roads and parking lots will be paved and repaired.

Visitors to Claremont Nature Centre will benefit from the construction of two new outdoor accessible learning spaces, including covered shelters to enable programming during inclement weather, and improvements to the driveway and parking lot.

CEO John MacKenzie provided remarks on behalf of TRCA and distinguished guests in attendance included:

- Dave Barton, Mayor, Township of Uxbridge, and Vice Chair of TRCA Board of Directors
- Kevin Ashe, Mayor, City of Pickering and TRCA Board Member
- Mara Nagy, City Councillor Ward 2, City of Pickering
- Linda Cook, Regional Councillor Ward 2, City of Pickering
- Lisa Robinson, City Councillor Ward 1, City of Pickering
- Maurice Brenner, Regional Councillor Ward 1, City of Pickering

Exhibit Launch “*Invented: Propelled by Imagination*”

On April 20, Black Creek Pioneer Village formally launched their newly curated exhibit, “*Invented: Propelled by Imagination*.”

This exhibition explores how the 19th century was an incredible time of rapid change. The scientific advancements achieved during this time shape how we see the world today. From Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* to germ theory to the first periodic table of elements, the 1800s were full of scientific innovation. These new revelations sparked the imaginations of writers and illustrators as they dreamed of a different future in a new genre: science-fiction. Where the impossible becomes possible.

Many staff, volunteers and partners that contributed to the launch of the exhibit attended and were treated to light refreshments, costumed storm troopers, and other figures from the Star Wars franchise.

CEO John MacKenzie addressed the guests, along with Black Creek’s General Manager, Wendy Rowney and Curator, Allison White.

Raising of the Pride Flag

On June 1, members of TRCA’s Senior Leadership Team joined staff at Black Creek Pioneer Village in a raising of the Pride flag commemoration to kick off Pride month.

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As June is Pride Month, the Pride Flag was raised on June 1 and flown until June 30 at our flagpole locations:

- Albion Hills Conservation Park
- Black Creek Pioneer Village
- Claremont Nature Centre
- Glen Haffy Conservation Park
- Indian Line Campground

Raising the Pride flag is an important symbol of solidarity and support for the 2SLGBTQ+ community and reinforces TRCA's message and shared commitment to creating a more inclusive TRCA for our staff, visitors, and partners.

Disc Golf Launch at Bruce's Mill

On June 3, TRCA, in partnership with ChainLink Disc Golf, unveiled a brand-new course for the fast-growing sport of Disc Golf at Bruce's Mill Conservation Park. The grand opening event was well-attended by members of the community, program partners, and elected officials, alongside TRCA Board members and staff to celebrate the newest sport now available at Bruce's Mill.

Distinguished guests that attended the launch and provided remarks included:

- Hugo Kroon, Deputy Mayor, Stouffville, Ward 1 Councillor, and TRCA Board Member
- Richard Ubbens, Director, Conservation Parks and Lands, TRCA
- Jeff MacKeigan, Co-founder, ChainLink Disc Golf

Other distinguished guests and TRCA staff in attendance included:

- David West, Mayor of Richmond Hill and TRCA Board Member
- Dr. Xiao Han, TRCA Board Member
- Cara Hovius, ChainLink Disc Golf
- Michael Tolensky, CFOO, TRCA
- Sameer Dhalla, Director, Development and Engineering Services, TRCA
- Laurie Nelson, Director, Policy Planning, TRCA
- Joe Petta, Senior Manager, Conservation Parks, TRCA

Ajax Youth Greening Project Cheque Presentation

On June 15, Marilyn Crawford, Deputy Mayor and Regional Councillor, Town of Ajax presented a \$25,000 cheque to TRCA through the Ajax Partnership Fund for Ajax Youth Greening Projects.

The cheque was presented at the Ajax Public Library at TRCA's workshop, Getting Started with Rainscaping.

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Greenbelt Foundation Celebrates Planting Half a Million Trees with Forests Ontario

On June 19, at Phyllis Rawlinson Park on the Oak Ridges Moraine, TRCA supported partners the Greenbelt Foundation and Forests Ontario in the celebration of the planting of 500,000 trees on private and public land in the Greenbelt and its river valleys over the last two years.

Distinguished guests that attended and provided remarks included:

- Jess Kaknevicus, CEO, Forests Ontario
- Edward McDonnell, CEO, Greenbelt Foundation
- Anil Wijesooriya, Director, Restoration and Infrastructure, TRCA
- Daisy Wai, Member of Provincial Parliament, Richmond Hill

Anil Wijesooriya highlighted the amazing work that was achieved with TRCA's partners, specifically that over the last five years, where 490,000 trees and shrubs have been planted at over 300 sites across York Region.

TRCA's Staff Appreciation BBQ

On June 22, at Boyd Conservation Park, TRCA hosted its first Staff Appreciation BBQ. Over 500 staff attended the event and enjoyed a BBQ lunch and team building.

CEO John MacKenzie recognized the staff and highlighted some successes from each division and thanked staff for the amazing work that each employee performs each day.

UPLÅ VIP Partner Event

On June 22, at Bruce's Mill Conservation Park, TRCA supported our business partner Treetop Trekking in their launch and celebration of uplå, North America's largest outdoor trampoline attraction.

Hugo Kroon, Deputy Mayor of Stouffville, Ward 1 Councillor, and TRCA Board Member, along with Richard Ubbens, Director, Conservation Parks and Lands provided remarks and were joined by CEO John MacKenzie and CFOO Michael Tolensky.

Event Spotlight – Bike the Creek

On June 10, event partners City of Brampton, Town of Caledon, City of Mississauga, BikeBrampton and TRCA hosted the 9th annual Bike the Creek event.

More than 950 attendees participated in this year's event and were able to select one of six routes that spanned across Caledon, Brampton, and Mississauga.

Post-Event Survey Analysis

- 178 participants took part in the post-event survey and because of sending out the survey.

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- 94% of the respondents said they would participate in the 2024 event.
- 85% of the respondents provided positive feedback about the six routes offered along with the barbeque lunch and were highlighted as the best elements of the event.

Two dignitary rides were held with the following distinguished guests riding:

Caledon Ride Participants:

- Catherine McLean, Director, Community Services, Town of Caledon
- Antonietta Minichillo, Director, Planning/Chief Planner, Town of Caledon
- Andrew Pearce, Director, Engineering Services, Town of Caledon
- Carey Herd, Chief Administrative Officer, Town of Caledon
- The Honourable Sylvia Jones, Deputy Premier/Minister of Health, MPP, Member for Dufferin-Caledon
- Mario Russo, Regional Councillor, Town of Caledon Wards 4, 5 & 6, TRCA Board Member
- Arash Olia, Manager, Transportation Engineering, Town of Caledon

Brampton Ride Participants:

- His Worship Patrick Brown, Mayor, City of Brampton
- Steve Ganesh, Commissioner, Planning, Building and Growth Management, City of Brampton
- Kimberley Kane, Deputy Fire Chief, City of Brampton
- Dennis Keenan, Councillor, City of Brampton Wards 3 & 4
- Rowena Santos, Regional Councillor, City of Brampton Wards 1 & 5, TRCA Board Member
- Paul Vicente, Regional Councillor, City of Brampton Wards 1 & 5
- Graham McGregor, MPP, Member for Brampton North

The finale program included remarks from:

- David Laing, Chair, BikeBrampton, Master of Ceremony
- Sonia Sidhu, Member of Parliament for Brampton South
- Graham McGregor, Member of Provincial Parliament for Brampton North
- Michael Palleschi, Regional Councillor, City of Brampton
- Mario Russo, Regional Councillor, Town of Caledon, TRCA Board Member
- Victoria Kramkowski, Senior Manager, Government & Community Relations, TRCA

Q2 Media Coverage – Summary

Requests for information or interviews occurred from various members of the media during Q2 2023 either through:

- Our Media Request Form on our website
- Our media email alias

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- Directly to our Communications and Media Relations Specialist
- Our information email alias regarding media/research requests
- Reaching out to other staff at TRCA who notified the CME team

TRCA received **47** requests in Q4 through our online Media Request form. Of the **47** total requests, **18** were for TV/Radio, with the remaining related to print or online.

Highlighted below is a combination of the following:

- Media requests to TRCA resulting in media coverage.
- Additional organic coverage where TRCA was mentioned by name or
- TRCA's key findings/reports were referenced.
- Articles that resulted directly from TRCA issuing a press release.

April 2023

Date	Media Outlet	Title	Link
April 25, 2023	CP24	Live Segment	<u>STORY LINK</u>
<i>Relates to the Province's plan to move the Ontario Science Centre and TRCA's response to the Ontario Science Centre announcement.</i>			

May 2023

Date	Media Outlet	Title	Link
May 16, 2023	blogTO	Toronto is getting an epic new trail along gorgeous stretch of waterfront	<u>STORY LINK</u>
<i>Relates to the Scarborough Waterfront Project. Describes the work, improvements, and benefits to the community. Promotes the virtual public open house May 15 to June 9. No specific staff mentioned.</i>			

June 2023

Date	Media Outlet	Title	Link
June 21, 2023	City News	What's that yellow goo along Toronto's shores?	<u>STORY LINK</u>
<i>Relates to yellow substance seen along some shorelines in Toronto. TRCA comments that this occurs when large amounts of pollen is released by trees and plants and carried by the wind. When it lands on the surface of the lake, the waves push the pollen to the shore, concentrating it and making it very noticeable along the water's edge.</i>			

Media Releases:

TRCA was involved with **10** Media Releases this quarter, which led to additional media coverage:

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Date of Media List Distribution	Title	Link
April 3, 2023	TRCA CELEBRATES A SUCCESSFUL SUGARBUSH MAPLE SYRUP FESTIVAL	<u>STORY LINK</u>
April 13, 2023	STAY SAFE: HELP PREVENT THE SPREAD OF AVIAN INFLUENZA	<u>STORY LINK</u>
April 17, 2023	GOVERNMENT OF CANADA FUNDING WILL IMPROVE ACCESS TO KEY TRCA GREENSPACES	<u>STORY LINK</u>
April 21, 2023	TRCA'S BLACK CREEK PIONEER VILLAGE LAUNCHES NEWEST EXHIBIT	<u>STORY LINK</u>
April 24, 2023	TRCA RESPONDS TO ONTARIO SCIENCE CENTRE ANNOUNCEMENT	<u>STORY LINK</u>
May 15, 2023	TRCA SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS SUPPORT THE SUCCESS OF IAGLR 2023	<u>STORY LINK</u>
June 5, 2023	DISC GOLF AT BRUCE'S MILL IS OFFICIALLY OPEN	<u>STORY LINK</u>
June 9, 2023	MAKE A SPLASH: TRCA LIFEGUARD AND SEASONAL JOB OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE NOW	<u>STORY LINK</u>
June 13, 2023	HUNDREDS PARTICIPATE IN BIKE THE CREEK 2023 TO SUPPORT ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION IN PEEL	<u>STORY LINK</u>
June 13, 2023	SAFETY REMINDER: SUMMER CAN BRING SUDDEN THUNDERSTORMS	<u>STORY LINK</u>

The above releases also resulted in significant follow-up including interviews with TRCA's CEO, CFOO and key staff involving several media outlets.

Q2 Key Learnings

1. Continue integrated communications support for signature or other major events, comprising social media content, speaking notes, media advisory, blog content, and other communications products as needed.
2. Staff surveying highlighted a need for easier visibility to Staff Hub content, especially for staff primarily on mobile devices. In response, CME has created a Hub Highlights email, comprising a curated monthly selection of items from the Staff Hub.
3. CME staff will focus on attending monthly divisional meetings for greater ongoing strategic collaboration.

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2023 Q3 Look Ahead

Below is a list of upcoming communications activities set for Q3 2023:

1. Communication support will be provided during Q3 to promote the following:
 - [TRCA Butterfly Festival at TTP, August 19](#)
 - [TRCA Celebrate the Humber event, August 27](#)
 - TRCA Service Recognition Awards, September 15
 - Upcoming Ribbon Cutting Ceremony for the Claireville North Multi-Use Trail being led by the City of Brampton, September 15
 - TRCA Adventures of Salmon, September 24
 - TRCA and partner ceremonies associated with Truth and Reconciliation Day, September 30

2. TRCA's updated newsletter strategy will consolidate 34 individual newsletters into one main TRCA Newsletter and allow current subscribers to update their personal preferences to receive content they wish to receive including TRCA parks, events, programming, and technical and scientific information relating to environmental issues and topics in the GTA. This new approach will allow TRCA to align content with our strategic objectives while also improving user experience.

Relationship to TRCA's 2023-2034 Strategic Plan

This report supports the following Pillar and Outcome set forth in TRCA's 2023-2034 Strategic Plan:

Pillar 4 Service Excellence:

- 4.3 Responsive relationships and a trusted brand with a reputation for excellence

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Date: July 27, 2023