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Show spotlights Falls park makeover



By John Law, Niagara Falls Review
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Andrea Mancuso of Niagara Falls will be featured in an episode of TVO's Giver show. The 14-year-old Father Hennepin School student and a group of kids will be fixing the Crimson Dr. neighbourhood park. (Mike Dibattista Niagara Falls Review)

For Andrea Mancuso, it started with a drive through Chippawa with her mom two years ago.

Why, they wondered, do they have such nice parks there? The one near their Crimson Dr. home was full of graffiti and broken equipment. Kids were scared to play in it.

The municipal election was two weeks away, but Mancuso played her hunch and sent a letter to candidate Jim Diodati: "When you become Mayor, and I know you will, please consider fixing the Crimson Dr. neighbourhood park."

Of course, Diodati won the election and became the new mayor, but he didn't forget about that letter. He phoned back saying the park would indeed be fixed. Not just that, it would be part of a new TVO kids show called Giver. Niagara Falls was among 13 communities chosen for the show from more than 60 submissions.

Naturally, Mancuso would be front and centre for getting the ball rolling.

"I was excited," says the 14-year-old Father Hennepin School student. "When we came here, we just sort of went with it."

Each episode of Giver gathers a group of kids to help create a playground in their community. Working with a construction crew, they have three days to design and build the park.

The episode filmed last July when Mancuso was 13. Joining her was William Van Ojen, 7; Caleb Rojas, 8; Mackenzie Smith, 8; Sophie Anderson, 9 and Carson Koabel, 10.

The episode is the second of the season, and airs May 29 at 6:30 p.m. Free preview screenings will be held May 24 at the Niagara Falls Public Library at 7 p.m., and the Seaway Mall in Welland May 26 at 2 p.m.

As the episode begins, the kids are asked to come up with a theme for the park. They agree on a pirate motif, with some Maid of the Mist thrown in as a nod to Niagara Falls. Over the next three days, they all pitched in transforming the neglected park into a new playground, complete with a crow's nest and treasure hunt.

The episode ends with Diodati praising Mancuso for her letter, and the public enjoying the playground for the first time.

"They were all so happy and thanking us," says Mancuso.

Mom Mary recalls when the playground opened 20 years ago. It was nice then, but fell into neglect in recent years.

A year after the new playground opened, she and her daughter are vigilant about keeping it clean. At the first sign of graffiti (and it only took a week), they place a phone call to city hall and it's quickly cleaned up.

"I tell (Andrea), take pride in what you've done."

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