

A fun adventure for only \$8

Passport offers discounts, freebies, includes transit

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A passport to get you across the border costs big bucks -- \$87 for adults and \$37 for kids 3 to 15.

Brenda Johnson, of Environment Hamilton, has what she thinks is a better idea -- an \$8 Passport to Hamilton lets a whole family travel all day, anywhere the Hamilton Street Railway runs, while taking advantage of discounts and two-for-one deals along the way.

Johnson says: "Two single moms can share a ticket with four kids and each pay \$4. They can then get a free family pass at the YMCA and go for a picnic lunch at Confederation Park or the bayfront. We also want to get people out of their SUVs and to try transit as a fun thing."

You can shop, swim, eat, learn and play at more than 100 stores, rec centres, galleries, museums and restaurants with special offers for pass holders.

Passes can be purchased in advance wherever bus tickets are sold and are valid once punched by an HSR driver. They're then good for the rest of the day. Eighty participating attractions are listed in the 2009 Passport to Hamilton Adventure Map, and another 35 that signed up since it was printed can be found online at environmenthamilton.org.

The program was launched in 2005 as a way for low-income families to enjoy low-cost outings as well as an eco-friendly inducement for all to leave their cars parked and use public transit.

It's supported by a grant from Transport Canada.

Hamilton transit director Don Hull is thrilled to have Environment Hamilton promoting the HSR.

"It's a great community partnership. We couldn't ask for a better scenario. We have an external agency marketing on our behalf. Brenda is putting all her own resources into it and we're reaping a lot of the benefits."

Hull says 13,979 passes were sold last year, up from 10,793 in 2005.

Johnson says: "I've worked on a number of ventures for Environment Hamilton, but never seen results as quickly. Thirty-five locations have signed up to participate since the 2009 map became available June 19. The minute it came out, people started coming in.

"It's just a blast. People have really embraced this, and Tourism Hamilton says it's something they can offer people who come in from the airport looking for things to do. A lot of people think it's just a summer program, but I'm hoping more will realize it's available year-round.

"You don't have to cross the border. Enjoy a staycation and see the gems of our city."

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