

?Magical? evening in store for fathers and daughters at Snowflake Ball



By Brock Weir

It's winter and there's magic in the air ? but not necessarily in the great outdoors. This Saturday, for local girls, and their fathers, uncles, and brothers, the magic will be found indoors in the showroom of Highland Automotive.

After a year's hiatus, the third Snowflake Father Daughter Ball is returning bigger and better than ever this Saturday, January 13, from 6 ? 9 p.m.

Founded by Melanie Bell, along with Highland's Jennifer Copley, the Snowflake Ball is a unique experience where dads, uncles, grandfathers and brothers can bond with their daughters, nieces, granddaughters and sisters on a fun night out featuring dancing, food, silent auction and goodie bags ? with all proceeds benefiting Girls Inc of York Region.

?Years ago, my sister would always send me photos of her husband and daughters at their father-daughter dance at their school in Whistler and I thought we didn't have anything like that here and it was time for Aurora [to have one],? says Ms. Bell. ?Fathers and daughters ? or an uncle, brother or father figure ? tend not to have as much time as they would like together, so I thought why not have something like that, but make it a fundraiser and make it affordable for people to experience a night out? It's a couple of hours, the girls get all dressed up, they have their corsages on, they come in and get their photo taken with their dad, and it is just about being able to experience that one-on-one time.?

For so many girls, that one-on-one time has always been at a precious premium. Growing up, Ms. Bell says her father was working all the time, so she saw him at 6 p.m. when he came home from dinner and on weekends ? that is, if she herself didn't have any ?extracurriculars? going on at the time.

?It's especially important nowadays where there is such a hustle and bustle and so many kids are involved in so many extra-curricular activities and everyone is just so connected technology-wise,? she says. ?I thought it was time to bring it back to some good quality time, put away the cell phones and iPads and have some quality time dancing the night away, enjoying the candy station, the silent auction for both dads and daughters ? and it is so much fun to watch the dads try to outbid the other dads. It is just magical.?

It is set to be a magical evening as well for Girls Inc. York Region, a non-profit youth organization dedicated to empowering girls and young women through a wide array of community programming focused on enhancing confidence and self-esteem.

This is the second year running Girls Inc. has benefited from the proceeds of the Snowflake Ball, and Ms. Bell says she has seen their programs in action.

?We were invited to one of the local schools in Aurora where they have a Girls Inc after school program and it was really neat because we got to visit with the girls and they talked about what they do after school,? says Ms. Bell. ?It was a very empowering program and it was nice to see where the dollars were going.?

In the previous two outings, feedback from participating fathers and father-figures has been outstanding. Ms. Bell says she particularly recalls one instance where a father approached her with his two daughters.

?He came up and said, ?Thank you so much for having this,' and started to get choked up, saying, ?It's only \$25, but you've made it

affordable for me to come with my daughter and experience that one-on-one time with each other because we don't get that," she says. "There are people who have lots of children, but where can you have a night out for \$25? It is just so much fun. You show up with your uncle, your dad, or maybe it is somebody who doesn't have a father and they are brought up by a single mom; it is being able to enjoy the experience, coming in and having some food and the ambiance is just magical. Sometimes I wish I could rewind to being a little girl and experience that.

"The most rewarding part of this is doing this for a great cause but, on the flip side, we're having fun doing it and we're seeing the enjoyment and laughter on these girls' faces. We're creating memories for these kids."

For tickets and more information about the Snowflake Father-Daughter Ball, visit www.snowflakefdb.com.