

Get off the couch and on your feet for the Community Better Challenge



By Brock Weir

It is time to get off your couch and onto your feet to help Aurora clinch the title of Canada's most active community.

Aurora launched its bid to nab top spot in ParticipACTION's Community Better Challenge on Monday afternoon at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex.

Spearheaded locally by Activate Aurora, the Community Better Challenge is a new physical activity challenge aimed at rallying communities from coast to coast to sit less and move more --- together.

"We are calling on all Canadians to get active and incorporate physical activity where they live, work and play," says ParticipACTION. "It's time to put down the phones and tablets for a few minutes and reconnect with neighbours and fellow community members."

The Challenge tasks individuals or organizations to track their physical activity minutes between May 31 and June 16 through an app. These minutes are tallied by community and the participating community that racks up the most minutes could be recognized with top honours --- and \$150,000 for their community.

"Two and a half years ago, we started on this quest to create an active community in Aurora and we set out a challenge for other communities to do the same," says Ron Weese of Activate Aurora. "ParticipACTION, fortunately, has picked up that challenge and spread it across the nation. We feel we're in a pretty good position to join this challenge and we believe it is a great opportunity for the community to come together, for all the community spirit reasons there are regarding healthy physical activity,

and if a well-respected national agency like ParticipACTION identifies us as Canada's most active community, I think that has a certain value to (Aurora) as a business in this community and the community at large.?

This was a view shared at Monday's launch, which was attended by representatives of a number of community partners, including the Town, the Aurora Seniors Association, York Region Public Health, the Aurora Chamber of Commerce and the York Catholic District School Board, in addition to businesses like Goodlife and 9 Round Fitness.

?We are excited to be part of this initiative?to share with our students the importance of being physically active and developing these healthy habits at a young age, and to build those physical literacy skills, knowing that it is not just their body, but their mind, their heart, and the emotional and, with our Board, spiritual health as well,? said Karen August, a teacher at St. Joseph Catholic Elementary School and the Board's lead on physical education.

?When you're active, everything is better. [Our students] love being active and they love showing that they are out there with their families enjoying the benefits that come with being active. I think that as long as we, as teachers and parents, are active with them, they will see us as role models and will want to continue to be active.?

Through the Community Better Challenge, the opportunities to become more physically active are almost limitless. Just about anything that gets you up on your feet and active can be counted on the ParticipACTION app. While individuals and businesses can log their minutes, so can groups, including co-workers.

?Fitness centres, dance studios, the Municipal Recreation Department have all expressed interest in providing physical activity counts from the day to day work they do,? adds Mr. Weese. ?Our Activate Aurora schools in particular have all agreed to monitor their children for physical education classes, and they have also implemented special events during the week such as daily physical activity walks in order to stimulate more activity in their children. We're also encouraging parents to have a conversation with their kids at the end of the day to identify activities they have done and to include those in their counts as well. It's as much an exercise in counting what is being done because we know we're an active community than it is trying to start something new.

?The tangible benefit is there is prize money and the prize money is \$150,000 for the winner across Canada. We certainly would be happy to receive that, but there are also Regional ones where we would be pitted against other communities in Ontario for \$20,000.?

Discussions with stakeholders are ongoing on how any prize money could best be used, he added.

?The notion here is that we would like to continue Activate Aurora and continue with it being Active Aurora by putting the money back into programs and grants that stimulate further physical activity with engaging more of our schools and providing additional opportunities; for instance, for girls and women who seem to be under-serviced [in sport], for cultural diversity and accessibility to sport. We're looking at a variety of ways to use that money, should we be so lucky.

?It's a great opportunity for 60,000 residents to count themselves in.?

For more information on ParticipACTION's Community Better Challenge and to download the app, visit www.participACTION.com.