

Local celebs dust off dancing shoes for annual Dancing with the Easter Seals Stars



By Brock Weir

For the last few years, Kyle Peterson has watched from the sidelines as local celebrity dancers have strutted their stuff.

Now, he's in the thick of it, learning what it takes, and has the beads of sweat on his forehead to prove it.

This Thursday, October 10, the outgoing Member of Parliament for Newmarket-Aurora will be one of six local celebrities to hit the dance floor at the Royal Venetian Mansion for the fifth annual Dancing with the Easter Seals Stars, the wildly popular fundraiser which has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars to help send kids with disabilities to camp for the summer.

Joining Mr. Peterson on the dance floor is Aurora-based business owner Antonella Cellini (The Artsy Baker), Joe Gorman, former pastor of Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church and current Director of Public and Corporate Communications for Humber River Hospital, realtor Matthew Miller, Patricia Ristich of Exhale Spa & Salon, and Tracy Walter of the Newmarket Chamber of Commerce.

For the past few months the sextet have been practicing their dance moves under the watchful eye of Patrick Derry, Kelly Stacey and Anastasia Trutneva, owners of Artistica Ballroom Dance Studios, who have been shepherding local celebs to dancing glory since the event's inception.

"This has become a part of our studio now," says Anastasia. "We're celebrating our four-year anniversary and this will be our fifth time doing this event. This event has literally been with us since the start of our whole coming and having it be a part of our growth just makes it feel like home."

But, at the end of the day, what keeps them coming back to the floor and taking on the challenge is the cause.

“This is something we believe in and it is definitely something super-worthwhile,” says Patrick. “This is something we get to do every day and we have committed our lives to dancing, and when there is any way to help kids who don't get to experience some of these things in their lives, it is just wonderful. As an event in the community, it is a lot of fun, it is great to do, we get to meet a lot of wonderful people who also care about the community, and there are just so many reasons to keep coming back to it.”

This year's Dancing with the Easter Seals Stars is a little bit different than it has been in the past. This Thursday's gala will feature six dancers rather than the previous eight, which has not only allowed the dancers to streamline the event, but put more of a concerted focus on each of the celebrity dancers.

“It is going to make for a much tighter, impressive spectacle of a show,” says Kelly, who invited The Auroran into Artistica's Industrial Parkway South Studio for a sneak peak at their group dance, which, without giving too much away, featured some impressive acrobatics. “I think this year has a lot more challenges laid out for our dancers. We know how they go through the process and I think they are going to really impress people from the beginning number.”

Mr. Peterson has been impressed with the dancers with each successive year and, now that his term as Member of Parliament has all but wrapped up, he jumped at the chance to participate – a commitment that was solidified by visiting an Easter Seals camp near London, ON, to see first-hand the funds raised in action.

“It was amazing to see what they do for the kids,” says Mr. Peterson. “The kids just get to be kids for the summer and I wanted to donate my time and help them with that cause.”

Mr. Gorman, who was supposed to participate in the 2018 event but had to bow out after hand surgery, agreed, adding, “Any time you have the chance to help people and raise money, I am willing to do it. Dancing is a great opportunity and we've been having a lot of fun.”

Mr. Gorman's fun has included tackling the foxtrot and the rumba, while Mr. Peterson has been working on some swing moves and some tap.

“We have great instructors, but I have seen Joe and he needs a lot of work,” jokes Mr. Peterson. “Actually, I'm in the same boat as Joe, so we're just taking instructions the best we can and trying our best not to embarrass ourselves. Come out, buy a ticket, help kids be kids by enjoying a good night of entertainment, food and camaraderie.”

For more information on Dancing with the Easter Seals
Stars Aurora-Newmarket, including how to purchase tickets and support
individual dancers, visit eastersealsdancing.org/newmarket.