

Camp Counsellor lends voice to online singalongs



What do moose, bumble bees and Princess Pat have in common?

They have kept young Aurorans busy in a virtual way since March ? and are doing so once again as part of the Town of Aurora's virtual summer camp programs.

Gaelen Strathdee, better known to campers as Guitar, was finishing up his year at the University of Guelph when the COVID-19 pandemic arrived in Canada. A long-time member of the Town's camp team, once the dust settled on the bulk of the academic year he was able to shift focus to his summer gig ahead, not knowing exactly what that would entail.

Within weeks, however, there was a shift to online March Break and Summer programs and Strathdee sprung into action, working with the Town on a series of singalong and repeat-after-me videos to such favourites as Great Big Moose, Baby Bumblebee, and Princess Pat.

?I have been playing music for a long time and it was a fun thing to do, even just as a hobby,? says Gaelen of the first March Break videos. ?Working on music and recording, I just thought it would be a neat idea. When I shared the first video, a lot of people loved it and it was around that time we started to put out video content and the reception was really good.?

And the positive reception has only grown.

Since the initial videos were released this spring, the program has expanded. Now, new renditions of the camp songs are out, this time involving Guitar and the rest of the team.

Gaelen has been a long-time member of Aurora's Camps team.

He first became involved as a young camper. Looking for volunteer opportunities in high school led him back to the program and his involvement has grown into a regular gig.

?In high school one summer I was working part-time at a toy store, but I wanted to do something to keep myself a bit busier and a bit more engaged,? he says. ?I signed up just as a volunteer and now I am doing one-on-one inclusion. Working with kids with exceptionalities really stood out to me. I came back two summers as integration staff, again supporting campers with disabilities, and then, in the following years since, I am now part of the supervisor team.

?This experience has really guided me as to what I wanted to do. When I first started volunteering at the camps, it was purely to keep myself occupied and the more I worked with the campers, especially the campers with exceptionalities, I realized that was probably something to pursue. Working in the camps has really helped me find what I want to do and I am looking into special education as I finish my undergrad.

?This has shown me something I totally couldn't have expected. Day to day, it is rewarding working with the kids. They are all so fantastic and working one-on-one you really get to know the campers you're working with really well. Having the opportunity to really get to know the campers even better makes it all even greater.?

To see what the Town of Aurora's Camps Team has been up to over the summer, and to become involved, head over to www.youtube.com/c/TownofAurora/videos for more -- and, of course, to sing along.

By Brock Weir