

Pan Am torch relay arrives in Aurora on Thursday



By Brock Weir

There is just one week until the Pan Am torch relay comes through Aurora and local torchbearers are getting into the spirit, preparing for their leg of the route.

The Pan Am Torch arrives in Aurora next Thursday, June 25, coming from Richmond Hill via Yonge Street around 10.30 a.m., before swinging east on Wellington Street and north on Industrial Parkway en route to the community celebration at Lambert Willson Park beginning at 11.30 a.m.

This past Saturday, several Aurora and Newmarket residents selected to carry the torch on segments of the local leg of the relay spoke of their excitement as Newmarket-Aurora MPP Chris Ballard introduced his three sponsored torchbearers to the community at large.

‘You are showing the world how Ontarians value excellence and friendship, unity and diversity,’ said Mr. Ballard. ‘Those are the values that lie at the heart of the Pan and Parapan American Games. The Pan Am torch is a symbol of health and fitness. It represents a commitment to achieving greatness in whatever we do and never giving up. Our torchbearers here today embody that commitment.’

Carrying the torch on a segment of the Newmarket leg of the relay is Dan Philion, a long-time advocate and fundraiser for muscular dystrophy in many facets of the community, including raising tens of thousands of dollars in scholarship funds and participating in programs to help combat the effects of poverty.

‘It is an honour and I have never been selected for anything like this before, so it is interesting to be part of something this big,’ says Mr. Philion, who tells *The Auroran* he has been working with the Pan Am people, as well as Mr. Ballard’s office, to get ready for the day, including special gear to soup up his wheelchair for the big day. ‘I am hoping it is going to be a nice day and all my friends and supporters will be out cheering for me.’

Melissa Blair, an active member of the Aurora community, will also participate in the Newmarket leg of the journey. A long-time leader in local scout programs, she is an active member of the Queen’s York Rangers, training each week at the Aurora Armoury while also working as a personal trainer at the Aurora location of Goodlife Fitness.

‘It is an honour to be selected as a torch bearer for the community, for the fitness, and for the athletes,’ says Ms. Blair. ‘I am just so excited! Since I was selected I have been following where the torch is going, who is running, and every aspect of the route. I hope

everyone has fun. It is just exciting having so many athletes everywhere and it is going to be fun. I always think you get out of the community what you have put into it and I have been involved in the community forever! Scouting, cadets, and being in the military for years, I have gotten a lot from it!"

Arlene Lindsay, a long-time advocate for organ and tissue donation, will take the torch in hand next Thursday on Yonge Street just south of Kennedy Street. An instrumental member of the York Region Gift of Life Association, she is an accomplished athlete herself taking medals in swimming, bowling, and ball at games held by the Canadian Transplant Association. She is also an active member of CHATS, helping with Meals on Wheels programs for local seniors, their walking club, and their telephone reassurance programs.

Having received a life-saving liver donation herself over 23 years ago, Ms. Lindsay says she's particularly proud to be here to carry the torch through a place she can call her hometown.

"I was ecstatic [when I heard] and it is an absolute honour to carry the torch," she says. "What an example to show everyone we can actually be here and do it. This is just fabulous. I'm most looking forward, well, to not dropping the torch! Having people cheer me on is going to feel really good, as is knowing I had the transplant, I am here, and I am doing it!"

This was a sentiment shared by Mr. Ballard.

"When the three of you hold the Pan Am Flames high and feel the spirit of the flame in your hands, you carry a very powerful energy," he said. "When you pass the flame to the hand of the next torchbearer, you are passing the ideals of the community, celebration, participation and pride that reach and inspire people from all walks of life."