

Aurora Music Festival will host the sounds of summer



By Brock Weir

Music festivals during the warmer Aurora months have come and gone, but a new Aurora Summer Music Festival, headlined by The Good Brothers, is putting a new spin on what Councillor John Abel hopes will be an enduring local tradition.

Councillor Abel was joined by event producer Don Bird, representatives of the Aurora Winter Blues Festival, the Festival Alliance of York Region and members of the up-and-coming band 'The Road Heavy' at Highland Park last week to kick off the event, which will be held at the Aurora Soccer Club.

'We miss the Jazz Festival we had, so it seemed appropriate that we have another festival to book,' says Councillor Abel, noting such an event would capitalize on the success of the Aurora Winter Blues Festival (AWBF), which has showcasing local and emerging musicians as part of its mandate.

'We are going to take small steps and build on the successes from there,' he says. 'We're doing a one-day event and it is going to be running just for nine hours, using local food vendors, and we will champion a youth movement, as well as some very popular bands.'

Hosting a summer music festival at Highland Park and the on-site Aurora Soccer Club is a switch-up from the previous attempts at a summer music festival, which have invariably been held at Town Park in Aurora's Downtown Core. The focus on a new venue is to 'move away and establish another venue without imposing on residents,' says Councillor Abel.

'At the south end here we have a natural, fenced, backed area, so it sets very well for a festival,' he says of land near the foot of Industrial Parkway South. 'It has a club house, there is lots of parking, and we're not imposing on neighbours.'

But, if the parking is not enough, Highland Automotive will be providing a shuttle service for revellers.

As a start-up festival, priority number one is 'putting bums in seats' and, for Mr. Bird, that starts with giving people good reason to attend the Aurora Summer Music Festival.

'We think we have covered that, times ten,' says Mr. Bird, highlighting the headliners. 'We have got some really huge talent' all kinds of people primarily from this area because we want to feature local talent. There will be a focus on their talent and their displays of what they are doing to really give them a foothold in the years to come because we plan on kicking this off to go for years.

'I have been doing this since 1974 and I think you have to certainly make [an event like this] family-oriented. It has to give

everyone a diversity and a balance of different kinds of music. People are locked into bordering music when they say, 'Oh, I don't like country music but I love Willie Nelson and I love Kenny Rogers.' They sort of back themselves into a corner by saying things like that. Here, we are leaning towards a blues edge with this festival, but what do you call The Good Brothers? They do bluegrass, they do country, they have won awards in any number of different categories, so it is going to be a diverse lineup for everyone concerned.'

Since first being elected in 2010, Councillor Abel has been a particular champion for establishing Aurora as a music destination, the most recent step of which was this month's approval of a new 'Music Strategy' for the Town. For him, there is no end to the importance of music in life and in the community.

'Music empowers people,' he says. 'It is a good, healthy pastime that builds to a healthy lifestyle economically and creatively ' and it is just fun.'

As a child, he grew up sharing his mother's love of theatre and theatre music, particularly Oklahoma! and My Fair Lady, but when The Beatles came on the scene, all bets were off. He picked up the guitar himself at the age of 54 and he says you're never too old to try something new.