

Aurora rides red wave for Liberals



By Brock Weir

Canadians from coast to coast rode the crest of a red wave on Monday night, handing Liberal leader Justin Trudeau a resounding victory and a majority government with 184 seats, and bringing to Aurora two new Members of Parliament in the process.

Aurorans turned out in droves for advance polls and on election night to select Liberal candidates Kyle Peterson and Leona Alleslev as their next Members of Parliament for Newmarket-Aurora and Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill, respectively.

Mr. Peterson handily won Newmarket-Aurora by over 1,450 votes ahead of Conservative incumbent Lois Brown. Elections Canada results peg Mr. Peterson's victory with 25,513 votes over Ms. Brown's 24,059. NDP candidate Yvonne Kelly came in third place with 4,806 votes with the slate rounded out by Vanessa Long of the Green Party and Progressive Canadian Dorian Baxter.

This is in sharp contrast to the 2011 Federal election in which Ms. Brown was sent to Ottawa with 54% of the vote with 25,557 votes cast in her favour, while Mr. Peterson came in a distant second with 11,207 votes.

Elections Canada estimates have Newmarket-Aurora's voter turnout at just under 68 per cent, with 56,471 of 83,108 voters casting their ballots. By contrast, 58,421 ballots were cast in Newmarket-Aurora in 2011.

South of Wellington Street in the newly-created riding of Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill, Ms. Alleslev collected 47.3 per cent of the vote with 24,104 while Conservative challenger Costas Menegakis, the incumbent for the southern tier of the newly-created riding, came in second with 23,043, or 45.2 per cent.

They were followed by NDP candidate Brenda Power with 2,908 votes in a slate that was rounded out by Randi Ramdeen of the Green Party and Kyle Bowles of the Animal Rights Party.

At Newmarket's Colonel Mustard's Pub, Mr. Peterson paid an emotionally-charged tribute to his late father, who died this past May, before saying Monday's election results signalled Canada had "turned a corner."

"Here in Newmarket-Aurora, we committed to running a positive campaign, and we did," he said. "We worked so hard and we called so many thousands of people and knocked on so many thousands of doors and got that message out one person at a time, one event at a time, one morning at the market at a time. People started to listen and it is a great feeling. I look around this room tonight and I see so many people that believed in what we were doing and it wasn't belief in me alone, but it was a belief in an idea and the commitment to a better Canada."

"I am just a messenger for that belief and I really do believe that we can build such a better Canada. You have proven Canada can be so much better, but it can only get better if we continue to fight for it. We can't take anything for granted. We can't take democracy for granted, we can't take freedom for granted, we can't take justice for granted?and tonight we proved that. We proved it together and that is the best thing."

Ms. Alleslev spent the early hours of Tuesday morning with a jubilant crowd at Turtle Jack's in Richmond Hill, where she paid tribute to her family and the volunteers who shaped a brand-new riding.

"This has been the longest campaign, but one with the best results we can ever hope for: a Liberal majority," she told supporters. There are no words to adequately tell you how grateful I am to everyone in this room. We took a riding that didn't exist and we built it from the ground! We started with just a few people and look at where we are today. This shows you what a team can do when they believe in themselves and the individual contribution they can [have] to make a greater difference in their own corner of the world."

As excitement of the crowds calmed, both of Aurora's new Members of Parliament shared their Election Day experiences with The Auroran. Mr. Peterson said he spent the "rollercoaster" of the day working at a couple of key polls in Newmarket while Ms. Alleslev spent the "nerve-wracking" day working to get out to vote. However they spent the day, it was worthwhile in the end.

"I can tell you right now it is better to win than to lose," joked Mr. Peterson reflecting on his 2011 campaign. "It was a rollercoaster because you never know. You are always optimistic and as soon as those numbers started coming in, I started breathing better. We won every poll by a little bit, but a little bit, plus a little bit, plus a little bit started adding up. The trend was there and I was feeling good about halfway through."

There was a different feeling this time around from Day One of the campaign, he added. A long campaign, the longest one in Canada in over a century, ultimately worked out in his favour, he said, as it gave him more time to introduce himself to voters and get that message out.

In an election such as this, incumbents are always more familiar faces, but the long campaign evened that score "and the same can be said for Canadians and Mr. Trudeau.

"He had 76 days to convince Canadians he was legitimately Prime Minister material and he started to resonate with Canadians," said Mr. Peterson.

Over the next week, Mr. Peterson says once all the loose ends of the campaign have been tied up, the first thing on his to-do list is meet with residents to start prioritizing their concerns and setting up his constituency office to serve them.

"The first thing on my agenda is to make sure I use the momentum we have created from this to now start to build the plan for what I am going to do next," added Ms. Alleslev. "We have been honoured to be given this opportunity to lead, make changes, create the vision and implement it. Tomorrow is the first day of doing just that."

The morning following the election, Ms. Brown expressed her thanks to the people of the riding.

"I would just like to say thank you to all the people of Newmarket-Aurora who have given me the privilege to serve them over the past seven years," she said. "It has been an awesome privilege."