

Aurora Soccer Club celebrates 65 years with renewed vision



**By
Brock Weir**

The Aurora Soccer Club is celebrating its 65th anniversary with new vigour and a new vision.

Founding members Benny Steenhorst and David Geering were honoured at Town Hall last week with Aurora's Excellence in Sports Award.

But the presentation was also a chance for the Aurora Soccer Club (ASC), which calls Industrial Parkway South's Highland Park home, to outline its vision for the future.

“We have officially become old age pensioners,” said the ASC’s Martin Ambrose on their milestone sixty-fifth birthday. “The big news is we have done a lot of revitalization [and under the tutelage of Councillor John Gallo] we have built a business plan over the last five years which has allowed us to take a look at where we’re going to take this club and how we integrate ourselves in the community over the next five to ten years. You’re going to see a lot more sports, social and charitable and cultural endeavours coming out of the soccer club as we move forward.”

Perhaps one of the biggest examples of this coming forward is a grand plan for an Oktoberfest celebration at Highland Park on October 5, which will include a 12-hour program anticipating between 1,500 and 2,000 attendees for good beer and live music.

“As we look forward to the long-term, we are working with Aurora Youth Soccer on this to make sure we’re not standing on each other’s toes, putting that aside to make sure we’re collaborating on how we ensure we get everything from the kids to the old people on the field of play and getting them involved in the social integration the club offers,” said Mr. Ambrose. “Our sweet spot really is anything over the age of 18, but

generally speaking, when you look at the demographic of the Town, that is kind of 30 ? 55 ? that is the majority of our playing membership in that sweet spot.?

With an eye towards membership sustainability, Mr. Ambrose said they have doubled the size of their playing membership from last year, going from 350 registered members to over 700 playing members actively registered with the Ontario Soccer Association.

On top of this membership of 700, there are many more who aren't registered and simply come by the ASC for a game or two of pickup.

?[Our membership] stretches as far as Bradford, southeast Richmond Hill, over to Schomberg, and over to Mount Albert,? he said. ?Almost 70 per cent of our players come from Aurora and we're trying to make this sustainable, something we, as a Town, can be proud of.

?[In recent years] we have also doubled the size of our over-45s, which is predominantly over 50s and over 60s, pretending they're young! What that should tell us, as a community, is that while we're aging, we need to be able to offer these programs to people also so, one, they keep the social interaction, and that [is important to] staying healthy, and, two, they get to have a little bit of exercise.?

Whether it is growing their membership, or bringing a bit of Oktoberfest to Aurora, Mr. Ambrose said everything the ASC does is done with an eye of charity and civic-mindedness. They have been particular supporters of the Heart & Stroke Foundation and Southlake Regional Health Centre in recent years and, this year, they are joining forces with the local chapters of Special Olympics for a unique game on May 10.

?We now have collaboration agreements with

[both Aurora and Newmarket]

organizations and the purpose of that is to make sure we don't leave anybody out on the edge of being able to play sport within the community and they can feel involved,? said Mr. Ambrose.

Following the presentation, Council members shared their enthusiasm for the ASC's plans going forward, responding to Mr. Ambrose's calls to work with municipal staff on how they can expand and update their current facilities to meet the demands of the ?twenty-first century.?

?The Aurora Soccer Club is the best-kept secret in this Town,? said Councillor Gallo. ?The amount of work that the Club has done over many, many

years and the tens of thousands of dollars they have given back to the community is extraordinary and we should be yelling from the rooftops the amount of work they have done. I am so proud of the work they have done, particularly recently ? and just watch what they do. They're going to achieve so many great things.?