

Bells herald start of new campaign for Aurora Cultural Centre



By Brock Weir

Rob Barfitt was on familiar ground when he came into the Church Street School on Friday afternoon.

A long-time member of the Aurora Community, he remembers frequent visits to the landmark building to pick up gear as a member of the local Boy Scouts.

Now a bit past the Boy Scout age and an active member of his family's business, Aurora Home Hardware, on his latest visit to the school, he was joined by local business leaders to ring the school's historic bell, signalling a new chapter in the building's history to mark the fifth anniversary of the Aurora Cultural Centre.

Representatives from Aurora Home Hardware, Backyard Pool and Spa, Omars Shoes, and Promotional Marketing got in their morning workout struggling to make the bell work its magic, but it was all for a good cause as they joined Prime Data Inc. and Remax's Susan Cowen Team as the foundation members of the 5-50-500 Campaign.

To mark their fifth anniversary, the Aurora Cultural Centre has reached out to 50 local businesses for a contribution of \$500. They hope to raise \$25,000 by the end of this year to support their family activities, concerts, heritage programs, and other activities that are provided free of charge to the community.

"We are very dependent on the funds that are greater than those we can raise through our own initiatives," said Laura Schembri, Executive Director of the Aurora Cultural Centre. "This is the first time we have actually gone out to our businesses with a program really explaining our need for support. We are in this beautiful building here that is beautifully cared for by the Town. We are very successful with the number of people who come through but the reality is we can't do it all ourselves. Here are examples of leading local businesses that have stepped up to support us in our time of need and responding to our request."

For the sponsors who gathered to ring the bell to signal their contributions last week, the opportunity to support the Cultural Centre was an opportunity to become involved in the community in a different way.

"We just feel it is so important to be good corporate citizens and just to be part of the community," said Raz Khamissa of Omars. "The community supports us and we want to support the community back. We have been to events here, so we see the worth in having a Cultural Centre. I come from the sports side of things and you normally think sports is everything to everybody, but you have to have a well-rounded Town and this is what the Aurora Cultural Centre provides."

A similar insight was offered by Robin Taylor-Smith of Promotional Marketing: "Sports gets a lot of funding and I don't think that

arts necessarily gets the support they need, so we are quite willing to help out where we can. It is a very necessary building and cultural expression to have in our community.?

The owners of Backyard Pool have always been supportive of community initiatives through their 22 years in business, noted the company's Richard West, while Mr. Barfitt said it was 'great' to support an initiative which has found such a great fit within the building as a hub of cultural arts.

Although she was unable to attend Friday's brief ceremony, Ms. Cowen was one of the first businesses to answer the call. In a statement, she said she was 'proud to support the Aurora Cultural Centre, a worthwhile local facility that caters to the interests of all residents, both children and adults alike and, at the same time, helps to preserve the heritage of beautiful Downtown Aurora.?