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Aurora's Community Newspaper

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Week of February 25, 2021



Mayor Tom Mrakas is pictured in Aurora's downtown core on Friday afternoon. In a speech to the Aurora Chamber of Commerce last week, the Mayor said it is time to take concrete action on downtown revitalization. **Auroran photo by Brock Weir**

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Time to move beyond "aspirational" goals for downtown revitalization: Mayor

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

It is time to move beyond aspirational goals to concrete action when it comes to revitalizing Aurora's downtown core, according to Mayor Tom Mrakas.

This was one of the key messages delivered virtually to the business community in an online "State of the Town" address hosted by the

Aurora Chamber of Commerce last Wednesday morning.

The Mayor's Town Hall, which was streamed over YouTube and Facebook, took the place of the annual Aurora Chamber Mayor's Luncheon which, of course, was unable to take place in its traditional format due to restrictions surrounding COVID-19.

"2020 has been like no other," said Mayor Mrakas. "Aurora, like every town and city across the world, has been impacted by the

COVID-19 pandemic. That impact has been profound and, in some respects, devastating. For the business community, the ways of doing business have forever changed; hours have changed, physical environments changed, delivery channels changed, consumers and their habits changed.

"Some businesses have been able to adapt, others have been less fortunate and some have closed. The enormity and toll of the pandemic has and

Continued on page 8

Getting back into Red leaves some questions: Chamber

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

On Friday, the Provincial Government followed recommendations from Dr. Karim Kurji, York Region's Chief Medical Officer of Health, bringing York Region out of lockdown and back into the Red (Control) Zone of Ontario's COVID-19 framework.

Effective this past Monday, February 22, York Region entered the Red Zone

Continued on page 10



CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION - Black History Month is coming to a close, but organizers of local virtual events hope the dialogue continues throughout the whole year. (Clockwise from Top Left) Phiona Durrant, co-founder of the Aurora Black Community group on Facebook chats history with Shawna White of the Aurora Museum and Archives and Reccia Mandelcorn of the Aurora Public Library. For more, see Page 15. **Contributed photo**



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STAY HOME, STAY SAFE

Hey York Region families!

York Region is now in the Red-Control zone within the strengthened *Keeping Ontario Open and Safe* Framework. Now is not the time to relax. The safest way to protect yourself and your family remains staying home as much as possible.

Draw a picture and show us what "Stay Home, Stay Safe" means to you and your family.

Once you're done, share your child's creation on social media using #StayHomeYR.

Creations can be submitted through the contest form on our website to be eligible to win a Stay Home, Stay Safe prize pack.

To submit, find information and for contest details, visit york.ca/StayHomeStaySafe

PLEASE CONTINUE FOLLOWING PUBLIC HEALTH MEASURES TO HELP STOP THE SPREAD OF COVID-19:

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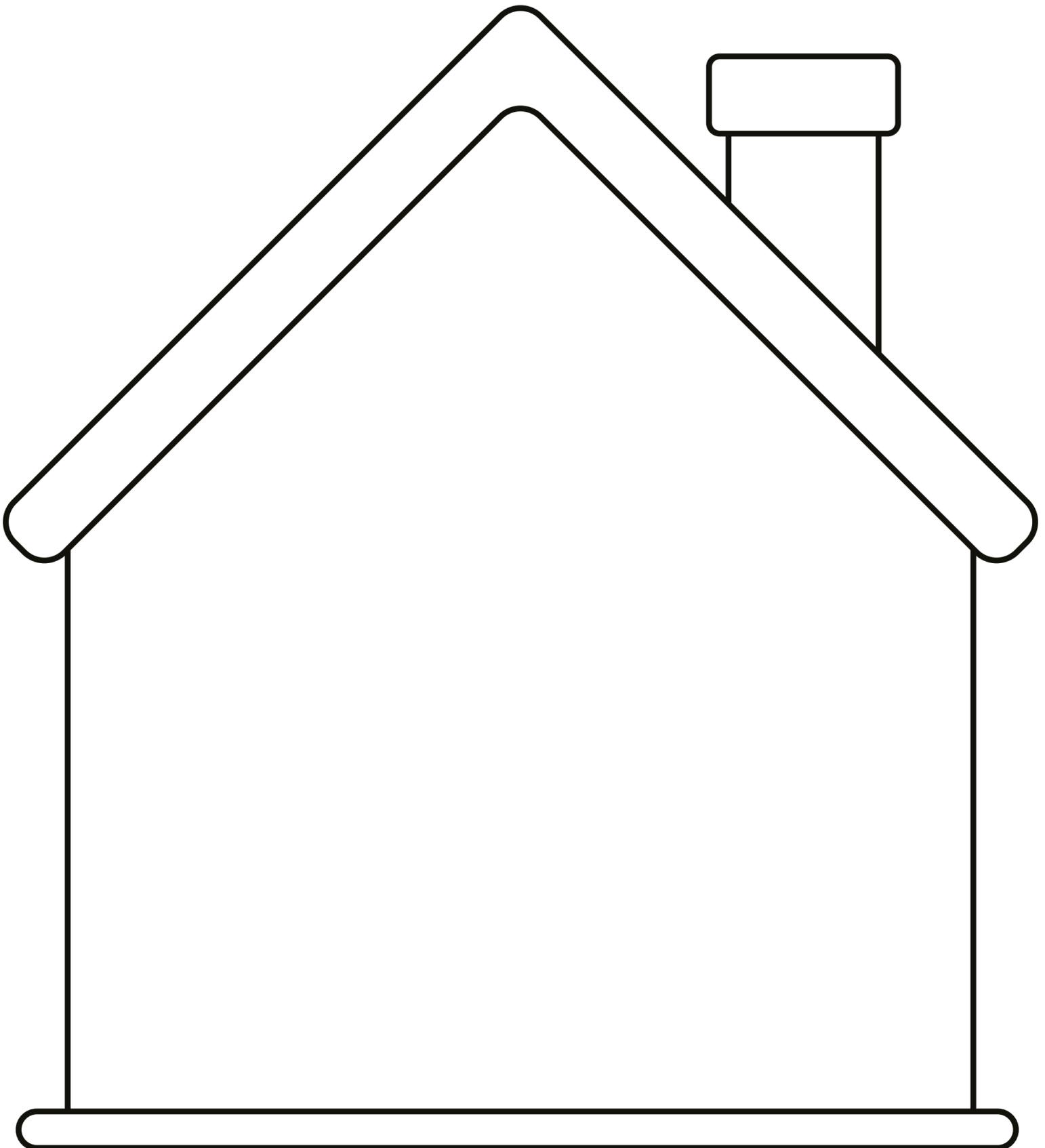
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Savour the flavours community has to offer with Auroralicious

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

If you have been looking for a new local restaurant to try but just don't know where to start, Auroralicious will help take away some of that guess work.

Auroralicious, presented by the Canadian Food & Wine Institute at The Armoury and the Aurora Chamber of Commerce, will see many local restaurants come together between March 12 and March 28 offering prix fixe (fixed price) menus for new and returning customers, putting their best foot forward in showing all the flavours Aurora has to offer.

Auroralicious was first proposed by the Canadian Food & Wine Institute (CFWI) as a way to not only promote area restaurants but underscore the importance of shopping – and dining – local.

"The idea came from a member of our team who suggested we do a Winterlicious/Summerlicious event," says CFWI's Chelsea Brewster. "I thought it was a fantastic idea, but being in the situation we were all in, I didn't think we could pull it off before Christmas. I reached out to the Town



and to the Chamber to say we had this crazy idea... and they were totally on board with it. We did a kind of sit-down at Christmas to figure out what makes the most sense, pandemic aside, for the timing of the year.

"We chose the March Break weekend to kick it off just to give people something to look forward to, to try and keep people as local as possible, and really bring the community together when we can't travel at this point in time."

Although March Break was subsequently delayed until April, that hasn't deterred participating restaurants from sticking to the plan and rolling out their fare next month.

"This is an opportunity for people to try out some of these restaurants and some of their best fares at great prices and it is an opportunity to not cook for a couple of weeks and just enjoy a little culinary staycation," says Sandra

Ferri, President & CEO of the Aurora Chamber of Commerce. "We want people who maybe haven't tried [the restaurants] before to just see what we have to offer in Aurora and hopefully that will give restaurants the opportunity to gain new clients and give people the opportunity to savour the flavours of Aurora."

"They should be going to explore Aurora looking for something they haven't tried before and really giving them a try to see how well they like it."

Ms. Ferri says since the global pandemic took hold, she has made a concerted effort to try the many restaurants the community has to offer. Mayor Tom Mrakas has tried to do the same, often posting a selection of his take-out selections on various social media channels to support local business.

Auroralicious is an extension of that sentiment.

"This is something that we have said time and time again during this pandemic that this is an idea we can pull together as a community and help support our local businesses, especially our restaurants that have been shut down for a long time," said Mayor Mrakas. "They have been struggling, so how can we do something that can help them? This was an incredible idea that was brought forward and something that we said we could do that would get excitement in the community and people would be able to get out and support local restaurants – and, in essence, our neighbours and our friends."

"It is also about getting that sense of community pride and understanding that even once we get out of this pandemic it is going to be a great opportunity for us to continue to stay local and realize we don't need to go outside of Aurora because we have everything here from a restaurant perspective. I think that is what people are going to start being aware of through this program and it will be a big success if that occurs."

For more on Auroralicious and a continually updated list of participating restaurants and prix fixe menus, visit exploreaurora.ca.



CORRECTION – The caption for this photo which ran on Page 1 of last week's Auroran should have read: Councillor Rachel Gilliland, left, and daughter Maddy, right, are pictured at socially-distanced Valentine's Day celebrations at Town Park with David Heard, Lori Hoyes, and Bonnie. Maddy spearheaded a Valentine's Day food drive for the Aurora Food Pantry, which brought in three truckloads of food and \$300 in monetary donations.

Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Chamber speaks out for small business

The Aurora Chamber of Commerce continues to be extremely concerned about the effects of the pandemic on our small business members and the long-term effect on the business community at large.

The pandemic crisis has continued longer than anyone had hoped or expected, and the continued uncertainty about vaccine deployment has exasperated the tremendous burden on all businesses. This has been especially traumatic on the small business community. The recent announcement to allow small retailers in York Region to open up when the stay-at-home order is lifted is an encouraging next step.

We recognize the importance of necessary protocols and the need to maintain the health and safety of the public. We also understand the goal to ensure that we do not encounter further surges in case counts or public spread. The current framework imposes severe restrictions, we believe unfairly, on small businesses. With the support and guidance of public health officials to develop and impose appropriate additional safety measures we support the expansion of opening additional sectors.

Small business owners in the hospitality, fitness and personal services sectors, with guidelines and controls, have the ingenuity and ability to operate safely in order to protect their livelihood. Limiting capacity, utilizing PPE and other appropriate restrictions are all available to allow a small business to function and maintain public safety at the same time.

Alternatives must be developed to allow small businesses to function and maintain public safety as the alternative is the undesired demise of our local economies.

Therefore, we respectfully ask all levels of government to allow small businesses to open with appropriate safety measures, including limited capacity, utilizing PPE and any other protocols that the Province and the Ministry of Health deems necessary.

Sandra Ferri
President & CEO
The Aurora Chamber of Commerce

Thanks to anonymous donor of chairs

I wish to thank the party that placed the two Mukoka chairs on the hill in the Woodlot on Henderson.

It brings joy to me at this time.

I can sit and enjoy the beauty and tranquility to get away from COVID.

You have given me a gift that I am thankful to have.

Erika Gamus
Aurora



@TheAuroranNews



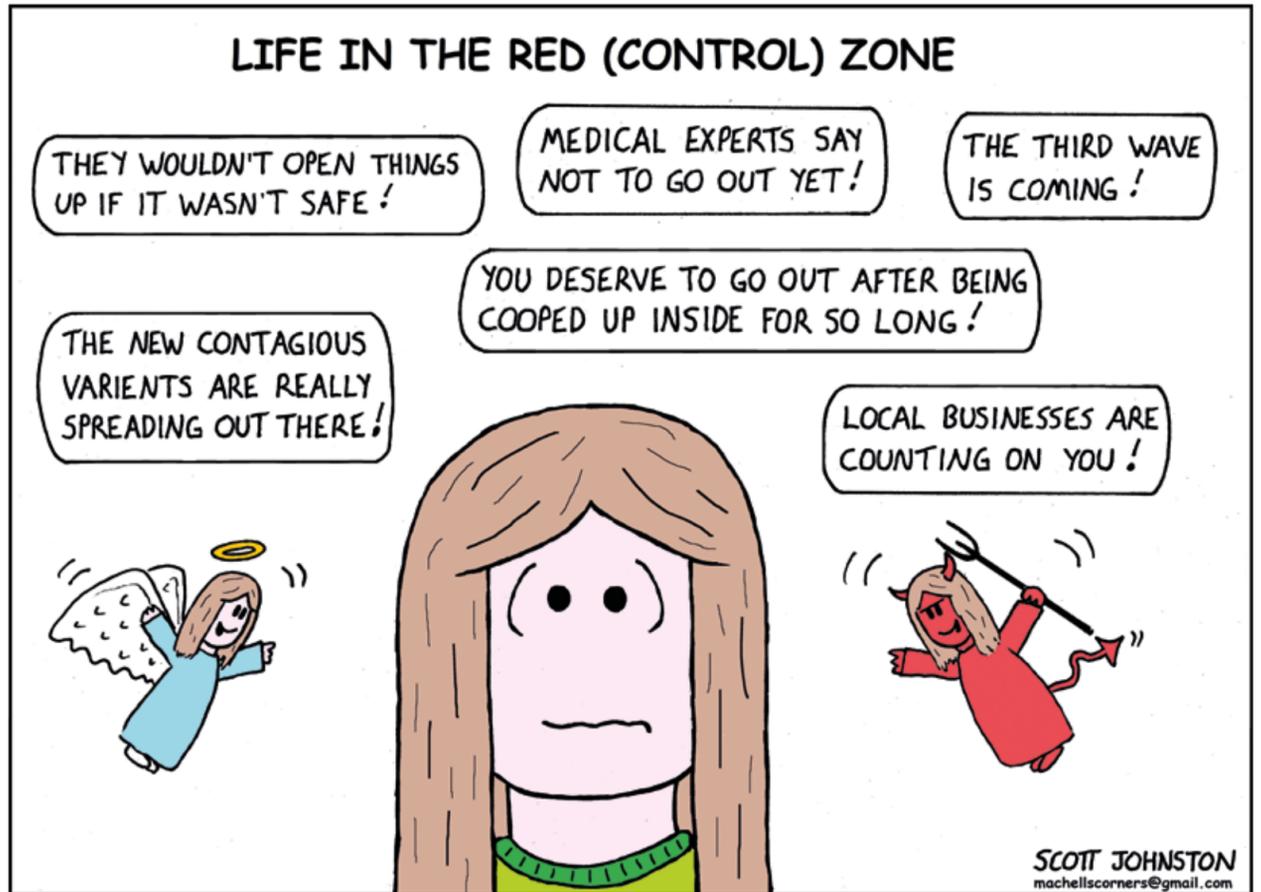
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Machell's Corners



Don't have to reinvent the wheel? Hold my beer.

Occasionally having to reinvent the wheel can be frustrating, but it is often a necessary evil.

The last twelve months have proved that with maddening regularity.

If you had called me a creature of routine over a year ago, I probably would have made a half-hearted attempt to deny it. After all, one of the best things about being in this job is never having time or monotony enough to get in a rut.

Sure, there were days where a routine was more invariable than others; the appointed day of the week when this paper has to get to press, is just one that comes to mind. But the other four, five, six days of the week often offered seemingly endless possibilities.

There were community events to cover, behind-the-scenes stories to suss out and uncover, people to meet, their stories to glean, and, ultimately, their stories to tell.

Rarely was a day exactly like another. It felt things fresh and, for us, engaged and involved.

Today, those chances to meet up over coffee to talk to somebody about the issues that are on their mind, opportunities to get out and sift through archives in person, or take out the camera to capture images an event or more than a handful of people, are few and far between.

When last March came around, and our first stay-at-home orders were issued, I would be lying if I said I wasn't a little scared. We all were. I would also be lying if I said I never had an emotional moment about it all. I'm sure we all did. And yes, there would be no point in denying a bit of panic set in when the realities of not being able to cover, uncover and share in the traditional methods were pulled out from under me like a rug if I was a film extra indulging in a little Three Stoogery.

But developing a new routine in the new reality fostered a sense of calm. All it took was a bit of time.

Eventually, the norms around traditional photo opportunities were rethought and rolled out. Tools that were necessary but hadn't yet been digitized were quickly sorted. And meeting up with people once again to get valuable input on events facing this community resumed, once people gained some degree of comfort with technology such as Zoom that was now an inextricable point of our day-to-day lives.

In short order, one of the many questions that kept me up at night – "How am I going to fill these pages with nothing going on?" – subsided, and not just because the evolving realities of the global



BROCK'S BANTER

Brock Weir

pandemic, including how the community was answering calls to action, provided no dearth of things to write about.

We were lucky, of course, that we didn't have to completely re-invent that pesky wheel.

Sure, there was a bit of a reconfiguration of how we in the office communicated, particularly those of us who had to collaborate directly face-to-face, yet we were quick studies, got the job done, and a new template evolved organically. Okay, so the routine sometimes veers close to monotony, particularly this past week where I had eleven Zoom meetings spread over two days which left me feeling contemptuous of the four walls of my home office, but them's the breaks.

Others, such as our retail and service business owners, have not been as fortunate.

There is no doubt in anyone's minds that retail, particularly small businesses, have been particularly hard-hit by the pandemic. With limited opportunities to welcome customers into stores for face-to-face interaction, owners, managers and staff have had to reinvent the wheels that had previously served them well time and time again.

Some outlets, if they have the space, have found success in the curbside pickup model. Others have had better luck making deliveries to customers who have stood by them through this challenging time. Restaurants have been able to maintain some cash flow with take-out options, but some businesses are better placed to adapt than others.

Consider your local shoe store. How comfortable would you be buying footwear that you weren't able to try on and get a feel for before purchase? I, unfortunately, know what my answer would be.

As of 12.01 a.m. on Monday, our business owners were tasked with executing another transformation. Between Friday and the dawn of a new day on February 22, those who have had their livelihoods

all but shuttered for nearly two months have had to re-learn the rules of the game, preparing to re-welcome customers and clients into their workplaces with new protocols, new capacity limits and, more likely than not, new expectations from those looking to do business.

Coupled with these challenges, they also need to consider the challenge and risk of customers coming in from COVID-19 hotspots like the Region of Peel and the City of Toronto still under lockdown, despite pleas from Public Health officials.

Part of the challenge is inconsistent messaging from the Provincial government.

The piecemeal approach taken by the Government only sows confusion: schools opening back up to in-person learning when communities are still under lockdown, regions coming out of lockdown when surrounding communities are at different levels of Ontario's COVID-19 framework despite similar numbers, and treating some types of retail as more equal than others.

Last week, I was asked by a co-worker if being the editor of three newspapers in three different communities which, come next week, could be at three different levels of the framework was in any way confusing? It certainly can be, and I can only imagine how much of a challenge it is, and will continue to be, for business owners to not only keep track of what is now required of them, but to instill consumer confidence and feel comfortable that they have the resources they need to keep themselves and their employees safe.

"While the trends in public health indicators are heading in the right direction, we still have work to do," said Dr. Dave Williams, Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health. "Everyone is strongly advised to continue staying at home, avoid social gatherings, only travel between regions for essential purposes, and limit close contacts to your household or those you live with."

Avoiding social gatherings should be relatively simple at this point, as is limiting close contacts to your households or those you live with, but discouraging travel between regions outside of essential purposes will be a tall order when residents of Toronto and Peel have the opportunity to experience a return to some degree of retail normalcy just across the street.

It might temporarily be a boon to business, but it could pose a significant challenge at the community level; a challenge that is unavoidable without a consistent approach, response and message. Until then, on top of everything else, all we can do is support another round of reinvention.

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The Aurora Museum & Archives is recalling...

Going to School with a Clean Slate!

With most students finally back at school, many parents can breathe a sigh of relief. Kids these days are going more paperless than ever before – except for the years that the slate tablet was popular. These writing tablets (76.12.19 and .22) were simply smooth slabs of slate inside wooden frames, which would take writing from a pencil made of softer material, such as chalk or shale. Students from the 18th to the mid-20th century would practice their handwriting and arithmetic on these tablets, which could wipe clean with a sponge or cloth, ready for the next subject.



Getting Things Done

Mayor
Tom Mrakas

I believe Aurora has some of the best restaurants and eateries in York Region!

That is why I am thrilled to announce the Town of Aurora will be partnering with the Aurora Chamber of Commerce, the Canadian Food and Wine Institute and our local restaurants to bring “Auroralicious To Go”, starting March 12 and running to the 28th.

This event will be an opportunity

for residents to “savour the flavours of Aurora” by purchasing from a “prix fixe” (fixed price) program. Based on the provincial guidelines

during the timing of this event, some restaurants may offer dine-in as well as take-out.

Now more than ever, it is important to shop local and show our support for Aurora’s business community. So, give your kitchen a vacation, put away the dish soap and, if you are able to, treat your family to the savoury flavours of our local restaurants. You won’t be disappointed!



Aurora Quiz - Part 9

It’s once again time to find out how well you know the Town in which you live with Inside Aurora’s ninth Aurora Quiz.

As usual, the questions are a bit challenging, but to make it easier, all of them provide a 50% chance of being correct.



INSIDE AURORA

Scott Johnston

- Aurora’s first indoor bathroom debuted in 1888. Was it in Hillary House or the Aurora Manufacturing Works (Fleury Plow factory)?
- How many trees did the municipality plant in 2019: more or less than 250?
- What was the film played at Aurora’s very first Movie in the Park in August 2006: “Toy Story”, or “Cheaper by the Dozen 2”?
- What do the following five parks have in common: Town, Ada Johnson, Trent, Stewart Burnett, and Edward Coltham: they are all on the Nokiidaa Trail, or they all have splash pads?
- When the Aurora Library opened in 1855, it was known by this much more fanciful name: The Association for the Diffusion of Helpful Knowledge, or The Repository of the Written Word?
- Yes or no; has a tornado ever been recorded as touching down in Aurora?
- There are athletes currently representing 14 different sports honoured in Aurora’s Sports Hall of Fame. Which sport has more athletes recognized, swimming or hockey?
- What’s the significance to Aurora of Amsterdam Island? It’s the unofficial name of the small island in Mackenzie Marsh, or it’s on the exact opposite side of the world from Aurora?
- We’re all justifiably proud of Southlake, our local hospital. What was its former name: York County or Newmarket General?
- Who provided the majority of the funding (\$11.5k of \$24.5k) to build the Aurora Cenotaph: Robert Michael Hillary, or William Mulock?
- Since local elections began in 1863 has anyone whose last name begins in either “X” or “Z” ever been elected to any position on Aurora Council?
- One of the Toronto Zoo’s most popular residents is named Aurora. Is she a polar bear, or an Arctic Wolf?
- With the former Highland Gate golf course now being developed,

how many public and private golf courses are left within Aurora: more or less than 3?

- When Head of Rail (train tracks) reached Aurora in 1853, would the Town’s entire population have been able to be seated in what is now Theatre Aurora?
- “You’re in Good Company” is Aurora’s current slogan. Where do we find the (real) similarly-sounding slogan “Urine Good Company”: a famous Broadway musical, or a company that makes absorbent undergarments?
- Yes or no; based on Aurora’s current bylaws, can you raise chickens in your backyard?
- Prior to the formation of the York Regional Police 50 years ago in 1971, how many police departments were there in York Region? More or less than 5?
- What was the theme of the mural at Yonge and Wellington before it was repainted to display Canadian Achievements: famous Aurorans or Old Yonge Street?
- What’s unusual about Tom’s Park: it is named after someone’s first, rather than last name, or it has the Town’s only permanent shuffleboard court?
- The hobby of geocaching is proving more popular during the pandemic. As of the beginning of 2021, how many geocaches are hidden in Aurora, more or less than 100?

Answers appear on page 17



SOUTHLAKE SNAPSHOT

Morgan Krauter,
Nurse Practitioner,
Regional Cardiac Care Program,
Southlake Regional Health Centre

Heart Failure Care: An Art and a Science

While innovation drives us, patient experience is really the heart of everything we do at Southlake. It’s a big part of why my role exists at all.

I started at Southlake three years ago, in a role unlike any other. While most hospitals have dedicated, separate positions for inpatients and outpatients, my role is a hybrid of both. It means I can better support patients through their entire journey, giving patients and families a familiar face they know and trust to guide them through every step of the process, whether at the hospital or at home. I care for those dealing with heart failure, as well as patients for whom heart failure is not the primary reason for their hospitalization. With so many factors at play, caring for them is not just a science, it’s an art.

The heart we bring to the job drives us to be better, to find new ways of delivering care, and explore innovative alternatives to enhance what we already do well.

Before virtual meetings had become part of everyone’s daily life, I was already using it to start the Virtual Heart Function Program for patients in long term care, who often fall through the gaps when it comes to receiving follow-up care. In April, I’m also excited to be leading the launch of our new Heart Failure Medication Titration Clinic. Often on multiple medications, this clinic will help our patients reach their optimal dosage faster using remote home monitoring tools, without the challenges and delays that can occur with in-person follow-up appointments. For patients, this will mean better symptom management and the best opportunity for recovery.

We’re doing amazing things to enhance care for heart failure patients, and donations make a difference. In fact, that’s why support of our hospital’s highest priority needs is so important. Undesignated gifts from our communities give us the flexibility we need to support the vital resources that we need to do our jobs well. It can support special products, technology and initiatives that aren’t funded by the government, including the CardioMEM. This tiny device smaller than a paperclip is implanted through a minimally-invasive procedure and allows remote monitoring, alerting us to heart irregularities months before they become critical.

Donations can change lives in a very real way. Whether it’s letting our patients living with heart failure have more chapters in their lives, or helping them write that final chapter, the work we do together matters. Sometimes donor support means we can add time to the clock. And sometimes, it helps us give people meaningful experiences with the time they have left.

This Heart Month I’m grateful to everyone who supports Southlake, and helps people like me ensure quality of life for the patients who depend on me. We do this because we love it. And we’re incredibly grateful to the people who share our vision to always be doing better by our patients.

Southlake’s Regional Cardiac Care Program serves roughly 10,000 patients each year from across York Region, South Simcoe and Dufferin Counties, and as far north as Muskoka. As one of the largest heart programs in Ontario, it offers cardiac surgery, interventional cardiology, electrophysiology, advanced heart failure management and specialists in echocardiography, providing advanced and emergency care.

To learn more or to donate in support of Southlake’s most urgent needs, please visit southlake.ca/donate.

THIS WEEK’S NEW POLL

Will you be participating in AURORALICIOUS?

Yes No Unsure

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PREVIOUS POLL

Is February 22 the right time to end the lockdown?

RESULTS TO DATE
February 23, 2021

YES
20%

NO
80%

UNSURE
0%



Christine Elliott
MPP - Newmarket-Aurora

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Control

As of February 22, York Region Public Health has moved to Red-Control under the Keeping Ontario Safe & Open Framework.



Wear a face covering.



Wash your hands often.



Stay 2 metres away from others outside of our household.

Help keep our community safe by continuing to follow public health advice. Learn more at Ontario.ca/COVIDresponse.

Vaccinations to reach residents 80+ beginning March 1: Kurji

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

As shipments of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine resume to Canada, York Region residents 80 years of age and older can expect to start receiving doses beginning at the start of the month.

According to Dr. Karim Kurji, York Region's Chief Medical Officer of Health, the Region is currently in Phase 1 of the Province's three-phase distribution plan, one which has seen targeted vaccinations at long-term care and retirement residents.

"As part of Phase 1, we are now working with our hospital partners to vaccinate healthcare workers in priority sequence identified by the Ministry of Health," said Dr. Kurji on Monday in his weekly update on the global pandemic within York Region. "The Province has also recently updated Phase 1 to include adults over the age of 80 and we expect to begin vaccinating residents aged 80+ by March 1."

The local vaccination program was subject to a special meeting of Regional Council last week.

Following the session, Dr. Kurji said it was important to underscore the prioritization of potential vaccine recipients and the "expansive planning" that has been taking place to get centres like the clinic at Newmarket's Ray Twinney Complex up and running, and the planning that has been taking place behind-the-scenes as inoculations ramp up.

"This plan involves many partners, including physicians, public health nurses, hospitals and many other community partners," he said. "Reaching our vaccination targets will be a total team effort. It is important for our residents to realize we have a plan and it includes reaching priority groups of people in a variety of different ways and we intend to reach all segments of the population."

"We have representation from many different sectors on our task force for immunization and [are] sensitive to the needs of many diverse and sector-specific individuals. We need residents to know our ability to quickly administer vaccines is based on supply. We will roll out the vaccine as rapidly as possible as supplies become available. We don't

We need residents to know our ability to quickly administer vaccines is based on supply. We will roll out the vaccine as rapidly as possible as supplies become available. We don't want to keep any vaccines in our freezers.

want to keep any vaccines in our freezers."

Vaccines, he said, are "safe, effective and the best way to protect yourself from serious illness." He also stressed the vaccines that have been approved and rolling out are not live vaccines and do not contain the virus.

"Therefore, the vaccine cannot give you COVID-19. After two doses, both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are approximately 95 per cent effective. It can take up to seven to 14 days after the second dose to achieve this protection. We are already seeing positive impacts of the vaccine in our long-term care and retirement homes with majority of residents having received both

doses of the vaccine.

"When it is your turn, we highly encourage you to get vaccinated. Together with our partners, we are all working hard to keep our community safe and to get people vaccinated when we can. But we need the community's support. We must all keep going and take steps to avoid the spread of this virus. Please avoid all non-essential travel outside Canada until further notice. If you test positive for COVID-19, providing all history of contacts and contact information is crucial to limiting the spread. Please be cooperative and kind to our case and contact investigators. We need to work together to keep the virus from spreading to more of our friends and families."

As of Monday, February 22, Aurora has seen a total of 914 confirmed cases of COVID-19, 20 of which remain active. There have been 854 recoveries and 40 deaths attributed to the virus.

Of the active cases, 15 are attributed to local transmission or close contact, 2 to institutional outbreak, 2 to workplace cluster, and 1 to travel.



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Southlake remains cautious after a year of COVID-19



Arden Krystal, President & CEO of Southlake Regional Health Centre. **Contributed photo**

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Just because stores are now allowed to reopen, don't take that as a cue to have people over to your house for gatherings, says Arden Krystal, President & CEO of Southlake Regional Health Centre.

It has now been a year since the first cases of COVID-19 were reported in York Region and, as the second wave of the virus continues to show signs of decline, lessons from the first wave continue to inform the hospital – and community's – response to combating the virus.

"We assembled an Emergency Operations Centre here in early February and we did that because both myself and several people on our senior team had lived through SARS and H1N1 and we had a sneaking suspicion on what this could look like – of course, none of us dreamed it would go on this long, but we knew that when a pandemic hits you certainly have to be prepared," says Ms. Krystal.

In those early days of preparing for what was coming, Ms. Krystal says there was a mixture of "fear and excitement" which quickly gave way to worry about supplies of Personal

Protective Equipment (PPE). It was an issue, she says, that kept her up at night the most.

"In Wave One, we literally dropped everything and we were in the Emergency Operations Centre seven days a week when we started to get COVID admissions," she says, noting that one of the reasons why there was so much work to do in the initial stages was the evolving raft of guidelines, policies and procedures being handed down by the upper levels of government.

Staff had to be trained, all masks needed to be tested, and things needed to be changed on the fly as the medical community learned more about the virus and how it operates.

"We were learning new things every day and changing things up," she says. "It was all hands on deck and it really didn't matter what your role was. I think the second wave has definitely been more challenging for everyone and that is because in the summer we resumed some of our activity. We have had less beds to go around, if you will, because we have more activity coming in that is not COVID, but also the burden of COVID really went up and that has put a lot more pressure on staff, physicians and on our bed complement.

"People are tired, too. They haven't had their normal occasions, they can't [go on vacation] or whatever it is they normally do for stress relief. A lot of our people here...have had the stress of trying to manage virtual learning, having elderly relatives they can't see. Our people who work here have all the things that every other person has, plus they have had to come in and work with COVID people all day.

"With more prevalence in the community, particularly right up to Christmas, [there were] a significant number of staff cases of COVID, so that was tough as well."

Last fall, when cases in the second

wave began to increase at an alarming rate, Ms. Krystal was one of three CEOs of York Region hospitals who issued a statement to the Provincial Government sounding alarm bells over capacity.

This was before stay-at-home orders and a Provincial shutdown were announced effective Boxing Day, but the challenge was just getting ready to hit a new level.

January was a "very, very busy month" at Southlake, seeing a high of 74 COVID-admitted patients in the hospital at one time.

Now that these orders are lifted, however, concerns remain on the table.

"We are concerned about the variants and we continue to monitor the situation closely," says Ms. Krystal. "Right now (Thursday, February 18) with COVID, we have about 24 patients of COVID in our hospital, four of those are in the Intensive Care Unit and all of those are ventilated. That is certainly lower than it has been, thankfully, however capacity remains a big challenge at Southlake.

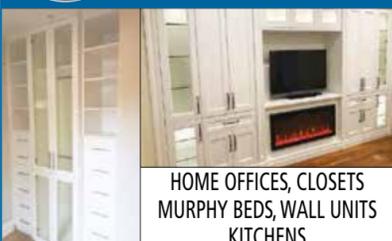
"During the first wave, the biggest issues we really had to deal with were fear of the unknown and fear of not having enough PPE, and really hoping to educate people on what COVID is and what it isn't. The impact on the community was actually the community did not come and seek care when they should have sought care. Our Emergency, as well as several GTA Emergencies, were less busy during Wave One and naturally, because of people's fear. We don't have any specific stats on it, but we did see more patients that were in a more advanced stage, for example, of having a heart attack or waited until symptoms of cancer had presented themselves before they came to Emergency. That is less of an issue in Wave Two.

"During Wave Two, I think dealing

with the fatigue of people has been the biggest lesson. It has really been about trying to do what we can to support the health and wellbeing of our staff and physicians. People are generally doing a very good job staying safe. The cases have come down and that has given us a bit of breathing space right now. I can't thank them enough for that, but I need them to continue. Whether or not York Region goes into the Red Zone or stays in the Grey Zone, continuing to follow the public health guidance of not having gatherings at home, not having close contact with people outside your household is so important to this. If the variant gets out of control and we're into Wave Three, that is going to be a pretty demoralizing situation for our folks. They're tired and they need a break."



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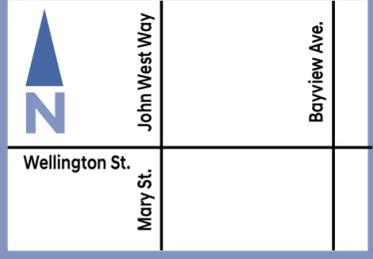
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Moving beyond "aspirational" goals for downtown



Mayor Mrakas gives his State of the Town address, pre-recorded in the Council Chambers.

From page 1
continues to be in our community and it is difficult to put into words because while we may all be in it together, we are not all affected in the same way. Each of us deals with our own challenges. The very real suffering of our residents, our business owners, and our community will require years of recovery. But our business community

has stood resilient and banded together to support one another and continues to find ways to support each other and move towards a positive future."

While the Mayor began his address looking back at the challenges Aurorans have banded together to overcome thus far, as well as the hurdles that still need to be cleared, the speech was very much looking towards the future.

Photo courtesy of the Town of Aurora

The Town of Aurora is currently developing a revised Official Plan, one which will provide a blueprint on how the Town develops through 2051. When complete, Mayor Mrakas said the Official Plan (OP) will "promote and enhance complete, vibrant communities and will promote, protect and enhance our heritage and green space."

In addition to guiding growth, the OP will look at encouraging businesses to thrive, identify where natural environment should take precedence over the built environment, and where natural and built heritage "converge to showcase the beauty of our Town."

"Part of managing for sustainability and for the future is looking at new lands and additions and how they benefit and detract from our Town," said Mayor Mrakas. "We heard from our community that this was important to them, so in November of 2020, Council approved Urban Design Guidelines [for] the Stable Neighbourhoods in an effort to provide further guidance for managing new builds and additions in the Regency Acres, Temperance Street, Town Park and Aurora Heights neighbourhoods. We expect these guidelines will help us grow strategically while respecting the unique character of our stable neighbourhoods.

"Not only are we respecting our past, but we are embracing our future. In doing so, I believe that a vibrant,

growing downtown core is essential to an engaged, thriving community. The successful revitalization of our downtown is dependent on a clear vision for the area and one that is developed in concert with the OP review."

Essential in this vision, he said, is a review of the Aurora Promenade Plan, a document which has acted as a guide for development along the Yonge Street corridor from Orchard Heights in the north to Henderson Drive in the south, encompassing portions of Wellington Street on either side of Yonge.

"The Promenade Secondary Plan was developed over 10 years ago to guide and manage growth in the Yonge and Wellington corridors," said Mayor Mrakas. "While this plan was a good start, our residents expect us to move beyond the aspirational ideas of the original Promenade Plan and move towards concrete action. That is why we need an update of the Promenade Plan. It has been long talked about, but this year we will move forward with an update and begin to move from concept to reality."

One example of development along the promenade cited by Mayor Mrakas was the recently announced plan to transform the long-languishing Howard Johnson's Hotel building into a completely renovated and re-faced seniors' residential building of 104 units, which will also provide assisted living options.

To help bolster Aurora's ability to guide development as it sees fit, Mayor Mrakas said he is recommending bringing forward a "community planning permit" plan which will be a "one-stop shop" for building and development approvals in the historic downtown core. Going down this road, he said, will "ensure clarity as we support local properties, such as community-building developments that support public transit, green space protection, and create certainty and transparency for the community, landowners and developers."

"With the community planning permits in place, it helps cut red tape, speeding up the approvals process for key developments in our downtown core, ensuring that they meet our vision for Aurora as defined in our Official Plan and soon-to-be-updated Promenade Plan," he added, referencing the recent decision made by Ontario's Local Planning Appeals Tribunal (LPAT) to uphold the Town's decision in blocking development on portions of the Henderson Forest, a fight he said ultimately cost taxpayers \$142,000 to uphold the local decision. "While this permit plan would allow for efficient approval processes [that are] in line with our OP, it is all for naught if we can't uphold our Provincially-approved official plans."

A cornerstone in this future vision for Aurora's downtown core remains, of course, the ongoing redevelopment of Library Square.

"This new facility will become a centerpiece of our downtown and the downtown will revitalize and grow around it," he said. "This is, to date, the largest project in Aurora's history and I am proud that we will all be here watching it happen and supporting its success. While these decisions were not unanimous at the Council table, what is unanimous is Council's commitment to the betterment of our Town."

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Consumer confidence and cannabis top questions for Mayor at Chamber event



Sandra Ferri of the Aurora Chamber of Commerce sits down with Mayor Mrakas following his speech. Photo courtesy of the Town of Aurora

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Now that York Region is out of lockdown and back into the Red (Control) Zone of the Province's plan to combat the spread of COVID-19, consumer confidence will be key to making businesses thrive once again.

Bolstering this confidence was one of the topics tackled by Mayor Tom Mrakas last Wednesday following his annual State of the Town address to the Aurora Chamber of Commerce.

Pre-recorded in Council Chambers and streamed to audiences over YouTube and Facebook, the Mayor sat down with Sandra Ferri, President of the Aurora Chamber of Commerce, for a Q&A session featuring a selection of questions generated by Chamber members.

"Consumers have spent a great deal of time ordering online and avoiding in-person shopping throughout the pandemic," said Ms. Ferri. "What will you as Mayor, and the Town, do to instill confidence in our local businesses as the economy starts to re-open?"

Mayor Mrakas tackled this question in a two-prong approach, answering that question with one of his own: "Is it safe

from a health and safety perspective?"

"There are a number of moving parts in order for this to happen," he replied. "Most especially, the Province and the Federal Government have to get everyone vaccinated to relieve the stress of the pandemic. We need to remind people to follow all the safety protocols and we need to ensure that our stores, retail, restaurants, manufacturing, industrial, are following the safety protocols. This will instill confidence in our local businesses."

"The Town can't instill consumer confidence and trust in our local businesses; that is the job of the retailers, of all our businesses, and those that do will benefit. All we can do as a Town is continue to encourage people to shop local and remind people of the safety protocols in place. We will continue to work with our local partners...to instill that consumer confidence and encourage people to shop local and help re-start our local economy. I am confident in the creativity and determination of our local entrepreneurs to adapt and thrive post-pandemic."

Entrepreneurship was the order of the day when the Mayor fielded a question related to the proliferation of cannabis stores in Aurora.

Aurora is just one of two York Region

municipalities, Whitchurch-Stouffville being the other, to opt in for retail cannabis sales, several applications have come forward to establish these stores, with some already open to customers – including Jane's Cannabis Shop at Wellington Street East and Industrial Parkway North, and Alpha Cannabis, just a stone's throw west on Wellington.

"As one of only two York Region municipalities that opted in to allow marijuana retail stores, are you concerned about what impact the growing number of cannabis retail stores opening up will have on our business community and the community at large?"

There might be a "stigma" surrounding cannabis, said Mayor Mrakas, and this, in turn, gives a "false perception" about the stores themselves.

"While Aurora is an opt-in municipality, we have seen that the stores are operated by entrepreneurs that are following the guidelines set out by the Province and our internal teams are monitoring the applications as they come through. We always talk about economic stimulus and these legal stores offer a solid tax benefit and we see no real community disruption, which is very similar to the LCBO. When you look at these purchases, they are not impulse purchases. People will still buy, and they might as well buy from an Aurora-based business, right?"

But Aurora-based businesses are often locating elsewhere than what has historically been the case.

The Yonge Street core has a number of vacant storefronts and, as Ms. Ferri underscored, when the Yonge Street, Wellington Street and Bayview corridors are looked at as three parts of a whole, there are over 65 storefronts that are for lease or sale.

"This number [has grown] over recent months," said Ms. Ferri. "Only four months ago, there were 35 along Yonge Street alone. What actions will the Town be proposing to bring back some of these services and businesses and support the small entrepreneur to stay in Aurora?"

In response, the Mayor outlined a number of investments that have been made in the downtown core, along with work carried out by the Chamber, the Town's Economic Development Corporation, and the Downtown Business Improvement Area (BIA).

"We are all collaborating on going forward with our plans," he said. "Our investment in the Promenade, Library Square specifically, we're trying to make it a Regional destination. That, and in continuing to offer supports through the York Small Business Enterprise Centre, continuing to ensure our local businesses are all aware of the Federal

Continued on page 19



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Getting back into Red leaves some questions: Chamber

From page 1

leaving fellow COVID-19 hotspots such as the City of Toronto, Region of Peel, and North Bay-Parry Sound in the Grey (Lockdown) Zone until at least March 8. Keeping the remaining three jurisdictions in lockdown followed recommendations from their respective Medical Officers of Health.

“Based on a general improvement in trends of key indicators, York Region Public Health will be moving back to the Framework at the Red-Control level and will no longer be subject to the Stay-at-Home order,” said the Province in a statement. “After returning to the Framework, public health regions are required to stay in their level for at least two weeks. The government will then assess the impact of public health and workplace safety measures to determine if the region should stay where it is or be moved to a different level. Public health regions may be moved to a higher level within the two-week window, if necessary, based on the set indicators and thresholds outlined in the Framework. In addition, Ontario has introduced an ‘emergency brake’ to allow the Chief Medical Officer of Health, in consultation with the local medical officer of health, to immediately advise moving a region into Grey-Lockdown to interrupt transmission.”

In a statement, Chief Medical Officer of Health Dr. David Williams said while health indicators in places like York Region have improved enough to loosen some restrictions, residents and businesses must remain vigilant.

“Everyone is strongly advised to continue staying at home, avoid social gatherings, only travel between regions for essential purposes, and limit close contacts to your household or those you live with, regardless of which level of the framework you’re in,” he said.

Revised Red (Control) restrictions will allow bars, restaurants and other eating establishments to allow 10 patrons for indoor dining with a limit of four people sitting together.

Essential retail such as grocery stores and pharmacies will be able to welcome customers to 75 per cent capacity, with other retailers like liquor stores, hardware stores, garden centres and big box stores

limited to 50 per cent capacity. Personal care services requiring the removal of masks is prohibited.

Organized public events and social gatherings will now be allowed to resume with limits of five people indoors and 25 people outdoors. Religious ceremonies, including weddings and funerals, will be allowed to operate at 30 per cent capacity indoors and a maximum of 100 people indoors. Event spaces are now allowed to open with 10 people per facility indoors and 25 outdoors, with no more than four people sitting together.

But this complex list of restrictions, however, has raised concerns from business advocates such as the Aurora Chamber of Commerce. Although they say getting back into the Red Zone will be a relief to many small businesses, some inequities still need to be addressed.

“From my perspective, as a community, I think we know we’re going to be living with COVID for probably the next six to twelve months or maybe even beyond that. Because of that, we need to find ways to help our businesses open safely while still protecting everyone – but still being able to maintain their livelihoods,” Sandra Ferri, President of the Aurora Chamber of Commerce, told The Auran shortly after the Province’s announcement on Friday.

“Our small businesses have really been suffering. It has really been hard for those who have been shut down to keep going. We’re really pleased the retail sector is going into a capacity limit of 50 per cent. What we’re still very concerned about is businesses in the hospitality industry, fitness and personal service sectors, where severe restrictions continue with limits of 10 people for indoor hospitality and fitness centres regardless of how big the space is. We still have some concerns.”

Finding that balance is key and Ms. Ferri said having a “very strict protocol in place for all” is necessary.

“I think our small businesses are doing a good job of maintaining protocol and we just need to give them the tools they need to make sure they continue to do that and keep everyone safe, while still being able to operate,” she said. “They are eager to get their businesses open and to be working again.”

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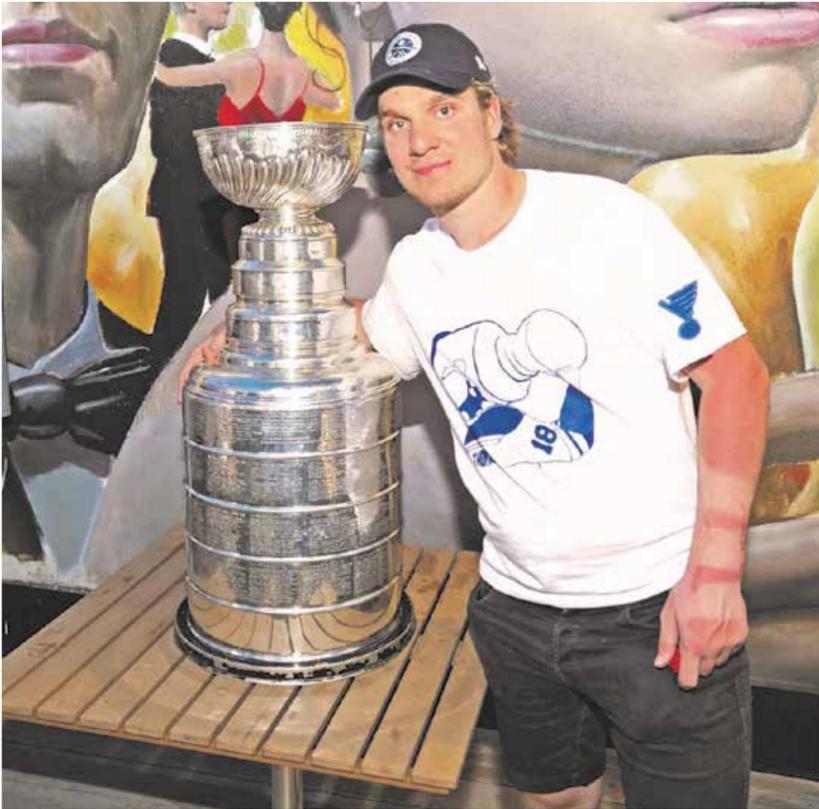
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Week of February 25, 2021



How are our athletes from Aurora? Sports stars staying active in pandemic



Robert Thomas is pictured with the Stanley Cup during his homecoming last year.

Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger

By Robert Belardi

During the pandemic, with chances of game time significantly diminished, we often find ourselves asking how Aurora's homegrown sports stars are faring in their respective leagues.

All professional and semi-professional leagues continue to be hampered by COVID protocols and what-ifs when a team and/or player comes down with the virus.

Who knows what will transpire out of all of this or how the rest of the year will pan out. But for now, let's take a look at some of our hometown heroes.

Derek Livingston

When Derek Livingston fully recovered from an ankle injury last year, COVID shut the whole world down.

"Since then, I've been able to do a lot more recovery and I'm feeling strong," Livingston tells The Auroran.

The Aurora native and Canadian Olympic snowboarder was able to slip back into his bindings last month to compete in the World Cup in Laax, the first competition back since the start of the pandemic and the first Olympic qualifier of the year.

In his halfpipe qualifiers on January 21, Livingston finished in sixth place. Two days later, when the actual competition began, Livingston finished in fifth place with 500.93 FIS Points and 45.00 Cup points.

"I honestly think that was the most nervous I had been in years; we had very

few days on snow compared to years before. All that plays a big role when you're dropping into the first competition in 10 months, especially since it was the first Olympic qualifier of the season. Luckily, I was able to land my first run and that gave me a big boost of confidence!"

Livingston said he is grateful for the result and this puts him in a great spot to qualify for the Olympics.

"Currently there are only 2 more events on the schedule for this season, a World Cup and World Championships, both in Aspen next month," Livingston confirmed.

"With a lot of events being canceled this year, the qualifying criteria might change moving forward. Right now, I'm just focused on landing runs and making them count. If I keep making finals I think I'll be in good standing for the Olympics."

There are normally six to eight events per year. Livingston hopes New Zealand will open up their borders so he can head down south to train and hopefully compete more.

"I'm just so thankful that we have been able to travel, I know a lot of people can't right now and I'm hoping things start to return to normal soon."

Robert Thomas

Aurora's Stanley Cup champion Robert Thomas is sidelined with a thumb injury that will see him miss 4-6 weeks.

The Blues centreman last played on February 6 against the Arizona Coyotes.

In the third of seven consecutive games between the Coyotes and Blues, Thomas tied the game at one-a-

piece, jamming the puck through Darcy Kuemper's five-hole to tie the game at one.

In the same period, after just over three minutes of ice time, Thomas left and didn't return.

It was Thomas' first goal of the season. In 12 games played, Thomas amassed six points.

The Blues take on the Los Angeles Kings this Friday. Puck drop is at 8 p.m.

Dylan Sikura

The 178-overall choice by the Chicago Blackhawks in the 2014 NHL Entry Draft, Dylan Sikura is off to a nice start in the American

Hockey League.

The 25-year-old Aurora native is now signed with the Vegas Golden Knights and is playing for their affiliate team, the Henderson Silver Knights.

Since his draft year, Sikura has played 47 NHL games, all with the Blackhawks, and had a great year with the Rockford IceHogs last season, posting 14 goals and 19 assists.

In six games with the Silver Knights this year, Sikura has four points.

The Paradise, Nevada club will take on San Diego Gulls Friday night.



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Empty downtown storefronts provide artistic inspiration, chance for revitalization

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Empty storefronts in Aurora's Downtown Core have been a perennial problem since businesses started migrating to the Bayview Avenue corridor and elsewhere. But what's that saying about doing something constructive about lemons? Local artist Corrie Clark is making a large jug of lemonade.

For the past few weeks, Ms. Clark, a resident of the Town Park neighbourhood, has been working behind the papered-up window of the former Caruso's store, taking inspiration from the store's more-than-a-century of history. The result is hoped to be the first of many art installations in these empty windows which will form the basis of a "roaming gallery" until these empty units are once again open to customers.

"If you see a problem, you should offer a solution. I saw a problem and obviously this is what the solution was," says Ms. Clark, who has been working with property owners, the Town of Aurora, Aurora's Economic Development Board, the Aurora Museum and Archives, and financial support from Magna International to make it all happen. "I thought it

would give hope, or even happiness to the people in the drive-by and will give inspiration to be tenanted and this goes right to economic development.

"Instead of looking at a bunch of sad windows and thinking, 'God, our downtown is terrible,' it was a question of what could we actually do about the downtown? This gives a sense of community."

In Ms. Clark's view, the empty storefronts provide the opportunity for one heck of a gallery space, a step in the right direction for the Town's vision of turning the historic core into a cornerstone of a "cultural precinct" anchored by Library Square and the cultural institutions part of and surrounding it: The Aurora Public Library, Aurora Cultural Centre, and the Aurora Museum & Archives.

"This is a great way to put in art and make the Cultural Precinct happen," says Ms. Clark, likening this opportunity to create a cultural hub as an opportunity faced by Stratford, ON, in the 1950s that ultimately led to the community becoming a theatrical and cultural hub in North America.

"When you build Library Square, because it is a Cultural Centre in a sense, it is not just about the building, it is about a community and its people," she says. "I have the pleasure of living



Aurora resident Corrie Clark is hard at work transforming empty storefront windows in Aurora's Downtown Core. **Auroran photo by Brock Weir**

down here, so I see the people walking around, I see the demographic: there are strollers and they are looking for somewhere to go. It is about expanding art in general, not just a narrow street. Art is never a narrow street. It is a wide berth and this, I hope, will generate the whole area so people will walk."

It is expected this first window mural and art installation at the former Caruso's site will be formally unveiled late this week or early next week and more installations will be filling storefronts along Yonge Street between Wellington and Mosley Streets in the weeks and months ahead.

Mayor Tom Mrakas had a sneak peek at the work going on behind the paper on Friday afternoon and said art like this will have many offshoot impacts on the community.

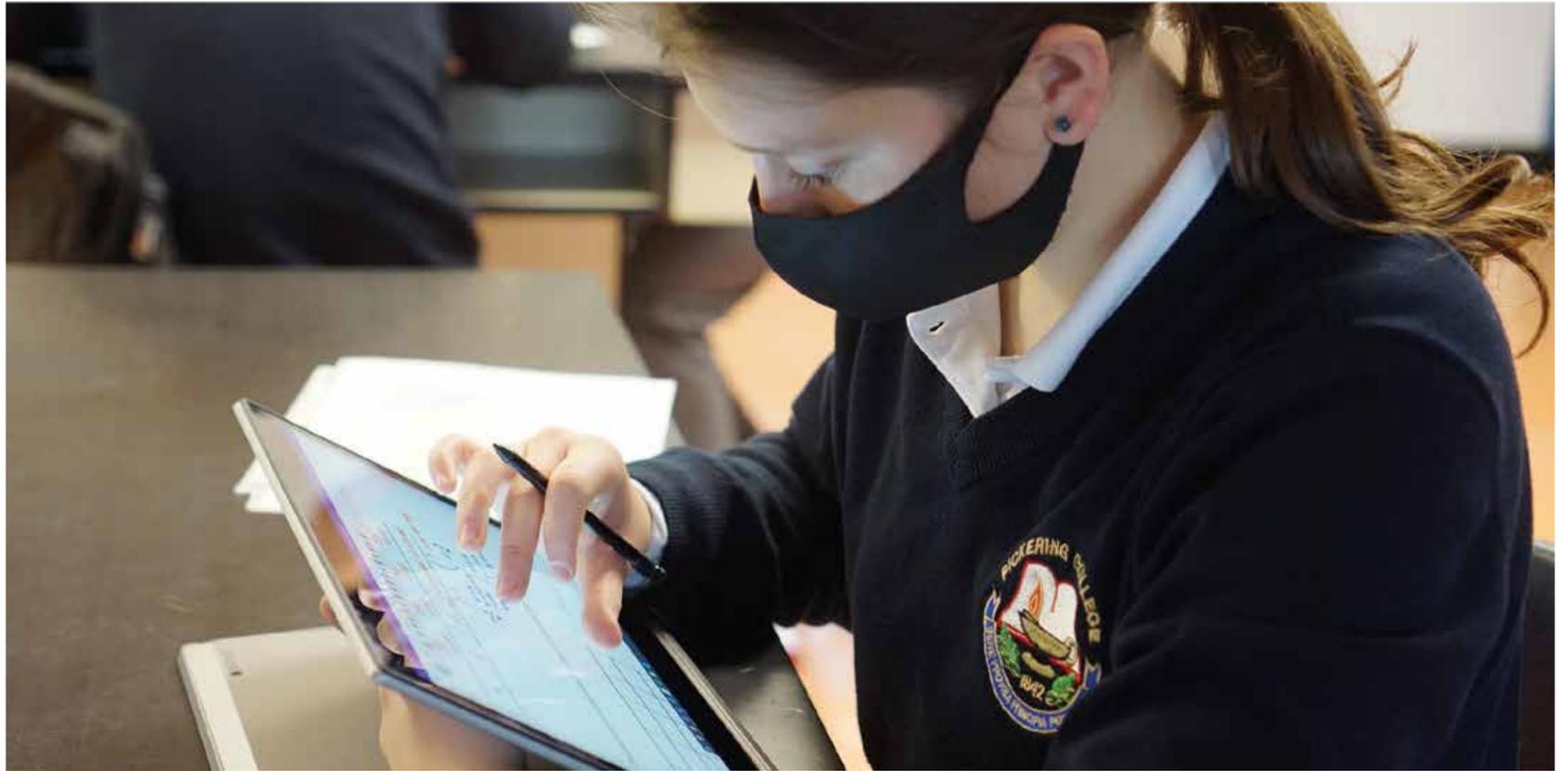
"Once you start to put all these

pieces together and you see all these art projects coming together, that is what is going to help create this area as a destination," he said, pointing out this is part of a greater number of activities going on in the area, from the installation of the Rainbow Crosswalk last summer, to future plans to install a canopy of lights over Yonge Street on the same block.

"Then, you throw in the business factor, your economic growth, you have businesses coming in and this area is going to evolve into one where people are going to want to see what is happening, what is going on, and what is in the windows. Let's go for a walk and see what is happening in the windows. It is an ever-changing, ever-evolving area [in which] artists are continually creating an atmosphere of excitement."

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Southlake seeks community input at Virtual Town Hall

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

By the middle of last week, Southlake Regional Health Centre had nearly 25 COVID-19 patients in the hospital, four of whom were ventilated in the Intensive Care Unit.

Compared to other points in the first and second waves, this is lower than it has been, but capacity remains an ongoing challenge at the local hospital – and it was already a challenge well before the world had ever heard of COVID-19.

“COVID has only kind of heightened some of those challenges we have,” says Arden Krystal, President & CEO of Southlake Regional Health Centre.

Planning for the future and ensuring capacity as growth continues across York Region is a top-of-mind issue for the hospital and they are once again asking for input from the communities they serve.

On Wednesday, March 10, from 7 – 8 p.m., Southlake Regional Health Centre will host a Virtual Community Town Hall co-hosted by Ms. Krystal and Dr. Charmaine van Schaik, Physician Leader, Maternal Child Program and Co-Medical Lead on the Vaccine Management Committee.

Coinciding with the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Town Hall will look back at challenges faced by Southlake over the last 12 months, look ahead to what future challenges might be, as well as solicit input on the hospital’s new Master Plan for a new build.

“The one thing you don’t have in a pandemic is an old building that has a lot of four-bed rooms and that is exactly what we have,” says Ms. Krystal. “Because of that, we have had to reduce our bed capacity in many of our rooms in order to accommodate infection control

standards and to isolate patients who are either suspected of having COVID or have confirmed COVID. It has really heightened a lot of the facility challenges that we already have, which is why we’re trying to move forward as quickly as we can to get our Master Plan approved.”

Once the Master Plan is in place, Southlake can start planning for capital redevelopment within the community.

Over the last seventeen years, Southlake has had largely the same footprint and, in that time, they have increased their number of beds by approximately 36 per cent. Ms. Krystal says they are “full to the brim” when it comes to looking after more patients.

“[One of] the ways we are dealing with capacity in the short term and medium term is we have learned through COVID there are a number of activities that don’t necessarily have to happen on a hospital campus,” she says. “With our Ontario Health Team, we have been planning for some time around making sure that we can do more virtual care, that there are certain activities we can hand off to our community partners because they, in fact, do them very well. I think we have learned a lot of lessons about how we can do things more efficiently, but no matter how much virtual care we still don’t have enough space here. We’re going to have to get a new development for this community sooner rather than later.”

The development of the Master Plan is ongoing. It has been driven not only by people’s wants and needs, says Ms. Krystal, but also population and demographic data so they can plan for the future.

“Whether what we hear from the populations we serve is positive or negative, we take it all in, adjust it and try to make changes or to continue to make the things we’re doing well stronger. I’ll be talking to people about this master planning and our

Continued on page 19



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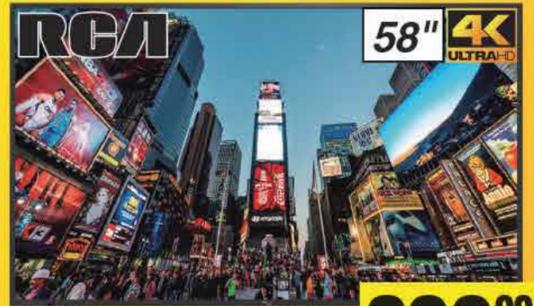
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Aurora Black Community spurs year-round conversation

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

As we come to the end of Black History Month, this is only the beginning of a larger, longer community conversation.

That is the mission of Aurora Black Community, a Facebook group co-founded by resident Phiona Durrant last year to spur dialogue throughout Aurora and beyond.

In the intervening months, the Aurora Black Community (ABC) group has grown from a simple forum for community members to share ideas into a community-building organization, one that has stepped up to work with various community partners, including the Town, to make Black History Month one to remember.

Over the course of February, the team has rolled out new programming that has hit a sweet spot for so many, including virtual cooking demonstrations, film viewings and discussions co-facilitated by the Aurora Film Circuit, history and heritage discussions with the Aurora Museum & Archives, Aurora Public Library and the Aurora Cultural Centre, and a series of speakers on the Black experience.

But, according to Ms. Durrant, February has been just the tip of the iceberg.

“It is about the engagement of the people, it has always been about that,” says Ms. Durrant. “It is one thing to do something, but it is another thing if people are engaging, enjoying and participating. It has been moving fast and it has been really, really amazing. Between Rebekah Murdoch, Ron Kellman and I, we have managed to just keep having a conversation making it relaxing and inviting.”

Perhaps the ABC came along at just the right time.

As a community resource, they quickly set to work not only with their own Black History Month programming, but

collaborating with the Town to create something wide-reaching. Playing pivotal roles in this, she says, have been Shawna White, Curator of the Aurora Museum & Archives, Nelia Pacheco of the Aurora Film Circuit, and Reccia Mandelcorn, Manager of Community Collaboration for the Aurora Public Library.

“Shawna is an amazing voice, and just wanting to be part of that conversation and wanting to help us get it along has been tremendous,” says Ms. Durrant. “When I thought about Black history and the role of ABC, which is bridging culture, education, food, art and music – how could I even start without inviting the Library, which is the heart of our knowledge. That was foundational. I love the collaboration because we don’t have to reinvent everything because they are here. It is collaborating and that is a beautiful piece.”

When you’re creating something new, constructive feedback is always important and the ABC group has received plenty of that, providing opportunities to build further collaboration along the way.

“When you create a group, you don’t really know what you’re going to get, what you’re going to be exposed to, and it can be different than what you thought,” says Ms. Durrant. “What I have learned through this and what made it worthwhile for me was the energy from the people, the positivity, the love. I never had any negative experience and even if it did come you embrace it because that is how we learn. It is the energy, support and the interaction that I see there. I don’t feel alone. It is one thing to be there and posting, but everyone is chipping in and doing a part.”

The ABC organization is now in the process of applying for not-for-profit status and as they look to the future, they are keeping their eyes squarely on the opportunities this month has helped facilitate. While the group is called Aurora Black Community, Ms. Durrant says that their goal is not just to be a place for the Black community but a place for

advocacy and bridging cultural gaps – and she doesn’t rule out a name change to reflect this goal.

“The key part of what I say to anybody who is reaching out is, ‘I don’t want to just talk about February. I want to talk forever.’ If this is a forever conversation then I would love to be at the table. Speaking to a school recently, it is the same thing: the teachers are looking for ongoing conversations, so what we have done, and the Town is amazing in collaboration on this, we have that Town webpage for Black History... and it will remain because it is an ongoing conversation for content and we are

continually putting things together. The next plan is to have a survey to the group: what are you looking for? What can you bring to the community? Based on their interaction and what they are looking for, we can have a group who can brainstorm and facilitate that conversation to see how we can implement what people are asking for.”

For more on the ABC Group, including revisiting past Black History Month programs, access Aurora Black Community on Facebook. For more on upcoming events through the end of the month, visit aurora.ca/blackhistorymonth.

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Aurora begins "greening the fleet" to reduce emissions

Changes coming to electric vehicle stations

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

The "greening" of Aurora is set to continue — one vehicle at a time.

This week, Council is expected to give its approval, subject to budget implications, of a Green Fleet Action Plan, a plan which will chart a course to turning vehicles used for municipal purposes, such as public works, over to electric, hybrid and biodiesel models.

The plan received tentative approval at last week's General Committee meeting.

While it will still be some time before medium and heavy-duty vehicles are electrified, the Town is keeping an eye on light duty electric trucks which recently hit the market for possible adoption as needs arise.

In the meantime, however, the Town earmarked three hybrid SUV vehicles as part of the 2019 and 2020 Capital Budgets. These will arrive sometime this year and will give municipal workers a chance to test the technology in the workplace while, says Parks and Fleet Manager Sara Tienkamp, "exploring the potential for rightsizing and converting to vehicles with lower emission options."

2021 will also see a transition of existing diesel fleet vehicles to biodiesel fuels in a bid to reduce emissions.

"The short term (2022 to 2026) Capital Budget implications of the proposed GFAP (Green Fleet Action Plan) are estimated to be \$105,000 to \$110,000," said Ms. Tienkamp in a report before last week's General Committee meeting. "This includes funding for GPS hardware to outfit the Parks and Bylaw vehicles. In addition, potential exists to convert to hybrid models for a limited number of vehicles currently in the Capital Repair and Replacement 10-year plan. Based on manufacturers' pricing, hybrid vehicles will require an additional 20

per cent funding to be included in capital requests for Council consideration upon endorsement of the GFAP."

Dominating last week's discussion was less the cost implications moving forward but the immediate impacts on residents, including a provision in the plan to move the public electric vehicle (EV) charging stations currently at Town Hall and the Aurora Community Centre to the Joint Operations Centre for sole use by parks and fleet.

Presently in place to allow residents to power up their EVs free of charge, a plan that was initially seen as a way to promote EV use within the community, the current models do not allow for a pay-for-use option.

David Waters, Director of Planning for the Town of Aurora, addressed the concerns expressed by Councillor John Gallo, who said the station outside of Town Hall was well used by residents. Mr. Waters said the Town is trying to access public money to increase the number of EV charging stations across the community and a policy for doing so is due to hit the Council table in March.

"They (the ones at Town Hall and the Community Centre) would be moved to the JOC where we would be using it for our own vehicles, but the other infrastructure we put in the community would simply recapture the cost of the actual electricity but provide the station," added CAO Doug Nadorozny. "There will be some there, they will just be like all the other standardized ones where you will pay for the actual electricity you will be using."

The fact these stations will ultimately be replaced with something else, albeit one that comes at a cost, was something Councillor Gallo said he was "fine" with, but Councillor Harold Kim questioned where the responsibility lay in the various levels of government to provide capital for these charging stations.

"There isn't a clear-cut line," said Al Downey, Director of Operations. "What

Continued on page 19

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INSIDE AURORA

From page 5

Answers

1. Hillary House
2. More: 342
3. "Cheaper by the Dozen 2", which was partially filmed in Aurora
4. They have splash pads
5. The Association for the Diffusion of Helpful Knowledge
6. Yes, one was recorded in May 1893 that caused great devastation downtown
7. Hockey, which has 7 – none of the other 13 sports have more than 2 representatives
8. It's on the opposite side of the world – if you drilled a hole in Town straight through the Earth you'd come out in the southern Indian Ocean near Amsterdam Island, which is equidistant from Australia, Madagascar and Antarctica
9. York County
10. William Mulock
11. No
12. Polar bear
13. More. There are 5, including St Andrews, Westview, Magna, Beacon Hall and Lebovic
14. No, not quite. Theatre Aurora can seat 150 people, and there were about 200 residents in 1853
15. "Urine Good Company" is the corporation in the Broadway musical "Urinetown", which has been produced by Theatre Aurora
16. No
17. More – there were at least 14 police services, including the Town of Aurora's
18. Old Yonge Street
19. om is a first name - while most parks bear the last name of those they honour, Tom's Park is named after Thomas Swindle
20. Less – around 77

Scoring:

- 0 - 5 You're not from around here, are you?
 6 -10 Not bad - you're obviously a local
 11 -18 Well done - you've been reading The Auroran
 19 -20 Congratulations, you must have been a Citizen of the Year

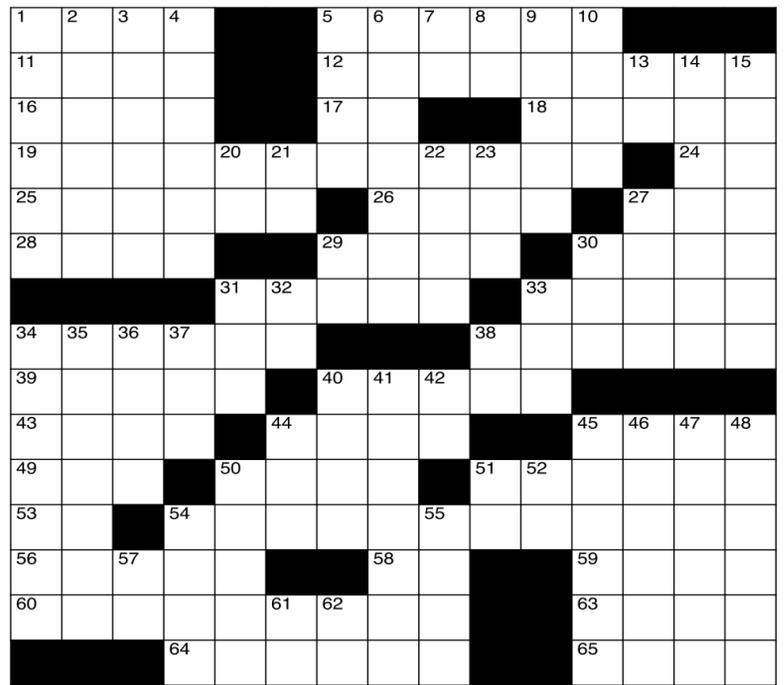
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CROSSWORD



CLUES ACROSS

1. Ancient Persian city
5. Spindles
11. Stake
12. Retrain
16. Close by
17. Commercial
18. One who publicly announces
19. American ballplayer
24. Junior's father
25. Go up or climb
26. Concern
27. When you hope to get there
28. Iacocca and Oswald are two
29. Plant of the lily family
30. Male college organization
31. National capital
33. Raccoonlike animal
34. Symbols of fertility
38. Astronomy unit
39. Series of ridges in anatomy
40. Hebrew leader
43. A portent of good or evil
44. Supreme goddess
45. Gelatinous substance
49. Engage in a contest
50. Famed ballplayer Ruth
51. Pledge
53. - __, denotes past
54. Revival
56. Spanish surname
58. Gold
59. Elsa's sister
60. Workplace
63. Large quantity of something
64. Engraved
65. Discount

CLUES DOWN

1. Shoe
2. Disquiet
3. Posture
4. Large nests
5. Soviet "Second Symphony" composer
6. Joins two pipes of different diameter
7. Exist
8. Overdose
9. Pleat of fabric
10. Predict the future
13. Burgeoning technology
14. Having made a valid will
15. Having no fixed course
20. __ route
21. Lethal dose
22. Indian musical pattern of notes
23. Athlete
27. Geological times
29. Atomic #21
30. In support of
31. Brew
32. Certificate of insurance
33. Taxi
34. Type of saying
35. For cigars
36. Phil __, former CIA
37. Local area network
38. Gym class
40. Philippine Island
41. Not great or bad
42. Eastern part of NY state
44. Gov't lawyers
45. Constructions
46. Former British gold coin
47. Unkeyed
48. Rechristen
50. Threaten persistently
51. Southeast
52. Cools your home
54. Removes the leaves
55. Regretted
57. Thus
61. Relief organization (abbr.)
62. Exclamation of surprise

ANNOUNCEMENT

BELLA HAIR STUDIO aka "GIAMPIERRES" CLOSING

On behalf of Peter, Teresa and Becky we announce that Bella hair studio will be closing their doors due to Covid -19. We say this with a heavy heart. Peter being in business for more than 45 years in Aurora formerly known as " Giampierres" is saddened with the decision but with all the uncertainty going on in the world Becky, Teresa and Peter made the decision to close. We would like to thank all of our amazing, loyal clients for supporting us through the years. We appreciate each and every one of you. You can still reach us at 905-727-1369 to touch base and let you know what our future plans are!

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Good news, Aurora: On-ice activities are back

By Robert Belardi

It's music to all fans' ears in Aurora.

The Minor Tigers and Aurora

Skating Club will be gearing up to get their programs back on to the ice by March 1, Marketing and Communications Director for the Minor Tigers Corby Saltzman and skating teacher Vicky Yaek confirmed with The Auroran this past Monday.

Saltzman said if the lockdown was lifted on February 22, minor hockey would work hard to get the kids back on to the ice this upcoming Monday.

"We do have approval to go through until May, to complete our season," Saltzman said. "Barring no additional lockdowns, the kids will

be on the ice for an additional two months."

players will be returning to the ice in the same format as before with all protocols and only 10 players will be allowed on the ice at once. There will be no body contact and no battle drills.

There will only be practices moving forward.

Saltzman confirmed there will be no Spring tryouts this year and all rep tryouts will have to wait until the Fall.

He also said there is buzz on social media that parents and children alike

are excited to be back out there.

And parents can watch from home. Saltzman said cameras have been set up in the arena so parents can watch their child practice through a subscription service. More details are to follow and will be posted on the Facebook page.

As for the Aurora Skating Club, Yaek confirmed only the STARSKATE program will be up and running beginning on March 1.

All registration can be completed at auroraskatingclub.com and an update on registration will be made on the website soon.



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Consumer confidence and cannabis top questions for Mayor

From page 9

and Provincial funding supports, sharing that information, those are the types of things we're doing as a Town.

"When you do look at the private

investments that are occurring in the downtown right now and you see what is happening, I encourage everyone to take a drive down Yonge Street. Go from the south all the way from the north end

and you will see why there is so much excitement, why we see the possibilities over the next year of what is going to transpire from economic growth. You see the private investments occurring and it

is all positive change. I think we're all excited about it and those are the kinds of things we're doing to work together to ensure the Downtown Core becomes a destination for all."

Southlake seeks community input at Virtual Town Hall

From page 13

capacity challenges and ideas of how we can make that better. I will be talking to people about our Operating Budget, some of the challenges we have and some of the progress we have made.

"The communities Southlake serves has lost collectively about 19 per cent of their long-term care capacity due to changed rules for infection control that affected the Class E and D homes, those older homes that have multi-bed wards. You can imagine losing 19 per cent of the beds, we already

didn't have enough long-term care beds. That impacts us because it means that a patient waits longer in our hospital to go to a long-term care bed and that is where they need to go. All of these things are issues and I am happy to chat with anyone about them, as well as vaccination which is kind

of our shining light right now. We're very involved in the vaccination effort at Ray Twinney Arena in partnership with public health and that is an exciting thing."

For more on Southlake's Virtual Town Hall, visit southlake.ca/townhall.

Aurora begins "greening the fleet" to reduce emissions

From page 16

we're looking at is trying to reduce greenhouse gases, so that is the main reason we're looking at electric vehicles and some of the infrastructure that is involved in them. It doesn't seem to be anyone who is saying, 'this is the way it should be done' and being ultimately responsible for that."

Councillors Rachel Gilliland and Wendy Gaertner welcomed the plan, with the latter underscoring the new anti-idling policy floated in it that will apply to municipal vehicles.

Going forward with pay-for-use charging stations "makes sense for efficiency," she said, but wondered if whatever users are ultimately charged

would cover just the cost of the electricity or whether the costs of the stations themselves would be factored in.

"The policy that will be coming out next month will deal with the rate for charging," said Mr. Waters. "What we're hoping to receive is some grant money to offset some of the cost and then the charging rate will be what the market is charging now for

electricity... to try to make it as revenue neutral as possible."

Added Councillor Gaertner: "If we don't get the grant, can we think about how we can actually make it as revenue neutral as possible? We are providing a service and it would be nice if we could do it absolutely free, but we're tight for money too. Maybe we can just defray it a bit."

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