

Hoedown promises good music, good fun, and a good boost to local groups



By Brock Weir

Get your cowboy boots polished, your hats brushed and, if you're preparing to do battle in a Showdown, make sure your voice is in tune ? Hoedown season is almost before us!

This year, proceeds from the annual bash hosted by Magna International will be shared between 15 York Region non-profit groups and representatives were on hand at Adena Springs Thursday to get into the spirit ahead of what is now going to be a two day party in Aurora.

?Hoedown, the traditional Saturday night event, has now become a two day event,? said Steve Hinder of Magna for the Community. ?Last year, we had a successful Hoedown Showdown, so what do we do at Magna? We kick things up a notch.?

Over the last two months, aspiring country singers of all ages have applied online to do battle in the 2014 Hoedown Showdown. Preliminary rounds will be held this week and those advancing to the next round will be able to show the community what they're made of at September's Ribfest at Machell Park. From there, the top ten will proceed to the giant Hoedown tent on the Friday before the main event to crown the winner.

The Hoedown Showdown will take place Friday, September 12. Tickets are \$25 and the event will feature not only the Showdown contenders, but last year's winner Johnny Green, the Wolf Creek Band, headliner Tim Hicks, and Hoedown mainstay Beverley Mahood.

For Mahood, being part of the Magna Family is something to be proud of and she said she is particularly excited to once again participate in the Showdown, which will shine a light on often undiscovered talent.

?It is so important to support talent within our community and the talent is unreal,? said Mahood. ?To give them that extra little push or bump to get on that stage as new performers is unreal. When you look out there in the world, how many artists have you known that come from entering talent contests? I have. Carrie Underwood has. Everyone has to start somewhere and there is an amazing response.

?[Being a part of Hoedown] has taught me all about what community is about, what friendship is about, what being together is all about and what philanthropy is truly about. Magna gets that. Any time I am asked to be a part of this, I am there with bells on ? and my hat on. Always.?

Soon, whether it is through initiatives like carwashes or other community events, the Hoedown will gain extra profile in York Region as the 15 community partners fan out to sell raffle tickets and raise awareness of not just the showdown, but the main event

on September 13.

Participating community partners are the Aurora Youth Soccer Club, Aurora Minor Hockey Association, Big Brothers Big Sisters of York (BBBSY), Deafblind Ontario Services, the Georgina Arts Centre & Gallery, Georgina Skating Club, the Heart and Stroke Foundation (York North), Hospice Aurora, Hospice Richmond Hill & Hospice Georgina, the Literacy Council of York-Simcoe/Learning Centre for Georgina, the Newmarket Stingrays, Newmarket Minor Hockey Association, the Queen's York Rangers 2799 Army Cadet Corps, Rose of Sharon and Welcoming Arms.

Each partner has new and exciting plans on what they are going to do with their share of the pot, whether it is to bolster or expand existing programs, or strike while the iron is hot in other areas.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of York, for instance, will expand their efforts in physical literacy through their Game ON! program for boys, and Go Girls! program. The idea is to get kids more involved with physical activity and become engaged in the world around them.

'Physical literacy is becoming far more in the forefront of our one-on-one mentoring,' said Sarah Dame, Executive Director of BBBSY. 'We include healthy choices, healthy mind, healthy body, healthy spirit, but how do we take it and continue to add it to the programs we are already doing?'

Their programs will not only be available to kids who have been paired up with mentors, but also those who are on a wait list.

'The sad thing is we're always going to have a wait list,' said Dame. 'One of our strategic priorities is ensuring they are not on the wait list for as long, and when they are on the wait list, we are serving them. They can come out and be engaged. We have 'Bigs' that are waiting for their 'littles' [and] they might not have a one-on-one match that they see regularly yet, but they are still coming out and doing stuff with the littles on a wait list.'

Youth will also reap the benefits through Hoedown proceeds in a one-off way as well, through the Cadets program. Saturday marked the 100th anniversary of the assassination of Archduke Franz-Ferdinand, so the countdown is on to the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War. As such, the local cadet corps will use their share of the pot to take their young members across the Atlantic to Vimy Ridge to commemorate one of Canada's most influential battles.

'We call it living history,' said Lori Hoyes of the initiative. 'The cadets are going to experience where the soldiers actually were. I think it will be a great eye-opening experience for them. The Canadians played a huge role at Vimy and I think they need to experience that firsthand.'