

Hoedown season is off to early start for community groups



By Brock Weir

Magna's annual Wild, Wild West Hoedown is more than just York Region's biggest party ? it is a movement that brings out the best of the community ? and 15 community groups are wasting no time counting the reasons why.

The 28th annual two-day party was officially launched at Aw, Shucks! last week with Juno- and Canadian Country Music Award-winner Paul Brandt announced as the Saturday headliner.

?We got so much positive feedback from the community [on Mr. Brandt] that we decided to bring him back and do it again,? said Magna's Steve Hinder, noting the excitement was mutual on the part of Mr. Brandt.

But Hoedown has always been about more than just the music and a night of fun, it is about the community. This year, 15 local charities and non-profits will be hitting the ground running selling raffle tickets and promoting the event and, in return, they will split 100 per cent of all Hoedown proceeds which topped \$460,000 last year alone.

?I want to tell you why this is so important for us,? Mr. Hinder told the Stetson-clad representatives from the 15 partner charities assembled on Thursday afternoon. ?There are a lot more country music events and festivals occurring today than there have ever been. The popularity of the genre continues to grow. Festivals like Boots & Hearts have already popped up. They have arrived on the scene and we are often compared to some of those festivals, but there is a fundamental difference between most of these and us. That difference is while other events draw top name talent from across the continent, some of the major events are, in fact, successful businesses in the for-profit category.

?I am not against making money, I think that is a great thing, but Magna is only involved in the Hoedown because of you. It is because of you. It's the only reason why Magna makes the commitment that it does every year by covering all the costs and has done so 27 times previous to this. It is to support the work you do and the contribution y'all make to the community. The community is stronger because of what you do, supporting not only all of our Magna employees, but all of us.?

The yearly Hoedown campaign usually kicks off in June, but organizers decided to get an early start this year to spread the word wider. They want to get raffle tickets into the hands of the charities to sell so the charities win and the communities win.

?Our license allows us to sell 70,000 raffle tickets and all of the proceeds go directly back to you guys,? said Mr. Hinder. ?Charity groups over the years have done a fabulous job selling those raffle tickets but the most we have ever sold is 46,000. So, we leave a lot of money on the table to sell those extra raffle tickets. We wanted to make this happen as soon as we can, so we can hit that

70,000 mark this year.?

So, how will the sales of those raffle tickets benefit the community? Here's a sampling they offered.

ALS Canada ? Founded in 1977, ALS Canada invests in research to find a treatment for the disease by 2024. Their share of the Hoedown proceeds will provide for improved in-home visits, education, advocacy, and providing assistance to clients navigating health and social care systems and bereavement in York Region.

Aurora Barbarians ? the local Rugby Club will use their share of the pot to grow the sport within the community including the establishment of a year-round training program for youth, coach training, sport development, and enticing area students to pick up the game.

Aurora Youth Soccer Club ? This year, the returning non-profit will use the proceeds for new equipment and facilities, enhancing their player and coach development programs and placing an emphasis on their Female Coaching Mentorship Program.

Autism Ontario York Region & Hand Over Hand ? Partnering in the Hoedown this year, these two organizations, which focus on people in the community with disabilities, will use their funds in various ways. Autism Ontario York Region will use their share to help offset camp fees for their youth and adult clients, while Hand Over Hand will use theirs to grow their programming and facilities for a growing community.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of York ? This returning non-profit, which provides mentorship and programs for local kids between the ages of 6 and 16 will use their slice of the pie towards enhancing their mentorship program, as well as a new Region-wide initiative to teach kids the importance of maintaining a healthy, active lifestyle through sports and healthy eating habits.

Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital Foundation ? A newcomer to this particular rodeo, the Hospital, which handles 580 inpatient and 5,000 outpatients each year, will use their share of the money to support life-changing treatments and therapies for kids with autism, physical and developmental disabilities along with arts, music, and life skills programs, and respite care.

?This is the 28th and it is an incredible testimony to the great corporate citizen Magna has become in our Town,? said Mayor Geoff Dawe. ?They have donated millions of dollars back to local charities and we really appreciate it because it is a very important part of what makes Aurora such a great community.?

This year's Hoedown gets underway on Friday, September 16 at the Magna Corral (337 Magna Drive) from 6 p.m. to midnight. The main event, featuring Paul Brant, will get underway Saturday, September 17, from 5 p.m. to 12 midnight.

For more on the event, including information on other participating charities, visit www.hoedown.ca ? or check back in next week's edition of The Auroran.