

Hoedown shatters records for 25th anniversary party



By Brock Weir

After 25 years, Magna's Wild, Wild West Hoedown continues to surprise ? this year shattering records by raising \$567,000 for local charities and community groups.

The cheque brought out at Saturday night's bash surpassed last year's record setting number by over \$20,000.

Thousands packed the tent erected on the lawns of Magna International on Saturday night for York Region's biggest annual party. Featuring the talents of Chris Seldon, Leah Daniels, Marshall Dane, Hoedown Showdown winner Johnny Green, and headliner Terri Clark, this year's Hoedown was, once again, a sellout.

?This is like camping with 2,000 people!? said Ms. Clark to the crowds. ?I am so happy to be here tonight. I want to say how honoured I am to be involved with helping so many people. This show is helping so many people in so many ways.?

The Magna Wild, Wild West Hoedown started 25 years ago as a humble backyard barbeque for the community hosted by Magna founder Frank Stronach and his family. Unable to attend this year's party due to his political campaign in Austria, the family was represented by former Newmarket-Aurora MP and executive vice chair Belinda Stronach.

?The [first] took place on the family farm,? she recalled. ?The best thing about Hoedown is it brings together all these tremendous community charities and all the people and the volunteers that run it. I also bring greetings and love and thanks from my father, who hasn't really missed a Hoedown in 25 years. He's busy campaigning in Austria ? and taking his shirt off!

?I thank you from the bottom of my heart for supporting the Hoedown for so many years and it is awesome [the support for] this awesome community that we have.?

For Magna CEO Don Walker, the annual event is about being good corporate citizens within the community where so many of their employees live. The reason Magna is able to do this year in and year out is because of their corporate constitution, dedicating two per cent of their profits to give back to charity.

?Since Aurora is the location of our head office and is such a great tradition, it is an honour for Magna and me personally to have the Hoedown put on and raise all the money that was put on for all the attendees,? he said, pointing out over 400 volunteers on the ground within the tent brought from various community partners getting an equal stake in all the proceeds raised in the event.

Also on hand was Aurora Mayor Geoffrey Dawe, welcoming his counterparts from King Township, Newmarket, East Gwillimbury, and Georgina to the stage in what he described as the ?heart of York Region.?

?Thank you so much to all our sponsors and a huge, sincere thanks to the Stronach family, the Magna Corporation, for the work you have done in the communities,? he said. ?We are truly blessed to have Magna as a corporate citizen. You can't understand how much they do for us.?

Whether or not people in the audience did or not remains to be seen, but the volunteers on the ground were certainly feeling the love. Colleen Zakoor, Executive Director of Community Living Newmarket-Aurora, a local charity providing assistance for adults with intellectual disabilities, was one of 30 people from the group there to keep Hoedown ticking from the setup. She was looking forward to a brief nap at home, before returning at 6 a.m. Sunday morning for the takedown.

?It is well worth everything,? she said. The blood, sweat and tears was all worth it. We are so proud to be picked. [Our share of the proceeds] goes directly to the people and there are so many areas this touches. To raise so much all at once is just phenomenal and we are just so thankful to Magna for running it.?

Also expressing her thanks was Beverley Wood of Welcoming Arms, the Aurora-based charity bringing many of the local churches together to pool their resources to help the community as a whole. Poring over a pad filled with precise long division calculations to get an idea of just how much each group was to receive.

She was ecstatic with her number crunching.

?All the joy and the smiles on people's faces says it all,? said Ms. Wood. ?Everybody is having a great time because they are contributing to the wellbeing of our community. This will make a tremendous difference to our programs and there is a certain amount of joy that has gone into the whole process.

?The involvement and the invitation to be involved has lead to full hearts. They will make a difference and they have made a difference.?