

Hoedown Showdown aims to 'jumpstart' aspiring singers' careers



By Brock Weir

Aspiring country artists brought down the house last year getting Aurora warmed up for the annual Wild, Wild West Hoedown the following night ? and this year, the Hoedown Showdown is returning bigger and better than ever.

'We have really upped the game this year,' says Erin Cerenzia of Neighbourhood Network, of the prize pack and incentives to get budding country singers and country music enthusiasts to get their voices in shape to try out for this year's competition. 'Our grand prize is actually valued at over \$15,000!'

As in previous years, there is a cash prize of \$1,000 for the ultimate winner, who will also receive a guitar and case valued at over \$1,200, but this year's winner will also receive what organizers dub 'The Ultimate Artist Package.'

'It provides the opportunity for these country music contestants and artists to really develop themselves as artists to create and produce a song and taken them to the next level ? not just record a song, but really jumpstart them into the industry.'

Coming together to give these artists a boost is an industry management and business mentorship program, facilitated by the management of singer Beverley Mahood, a mainstay of Hoedown, to provide them with industry contacts and the building blocks to establish a career as a country artist. As part of the package, Ms. Mahood will lend her expertise, along with Lee Daniels and Spin Music, for coaching on styling, song choice, song-writing, and performing live. As in years past, the package also includes recording time at Metalworks Recording Studios, this time, however, with recording sessions produced by Ms. Mahood and Sam Ellis.

Applications for this year's Hoedown Showdown can be found online at www.hoedown.ca/showdown, and entries from contestants 13 years of age or older must be received by July 15.

From there, applicants will be whittled down to a Top 40 who will take the stage at Theatre Aurora on August 11 for the preliminary rounds before the Top 20 are selected by August 20 ahead of the traditional next round that features in September's Ribfest.

'A modification new this year is we have actually added mentorship week for our finalists,' says Ms. Cerenzia. 'Following Ribfest on September 14 to 17, which is the week leading up to Hoedown, that will be our mentorship week where all the finalists will have the opportunity to come into Theatre Aurora and they will work with our Hoedown House Band to practice their songs to get them ready for Friday night.'

'I think over the past few years we have really seen such a high, high caliber of performers from such wide demographics and

whether you're a country fan or not, just seeing that quality of performance from these individuals, who are really homegrown community folk coming out to participate, is really extraordinary. So, it is a privilege for me to be part of the process and really see all these contestants perform ? and hopefully we will put on a great show for those who are coming out on the Friday night.?