

Local teens sought to be the voice for Aurora youth

By Brock Weir

If you're a teen with a lot of ideas of ways to get your friends and family more engaged and involved in your community, strike while the iron's hot.

Aurora is currently looking for local youth to take the Town's Youth Engagement Committee to the next level. Founded last year by a group of local high school students, applications are now being accepted through the end of August for a new crop of students to get local youth involved and have a strong voice for the issues that matter to them.

The key roles of the Youth Engagement Committee include energizing youth within Aurora, encouraging active participation at the Youth Centre, serving as a go-between with Town Hall and local youth, and developing programs to serve their needs.

Outgoing Youth Committee member Kelly Gary says the opportunity to serve the community in this way provided "big leadership" opportunities both for her and the rest of the members, and helped bridge a certain divide.

"It was definitely a big leadership development opportunity and we got to know people from the other high schools," she says. "We have people from each of the different high schools and that was a way to expand and make those connections, as well as to find out about things that were going on in the Town because there was kind of that divide between youth and what was going on."

Among their proudest achievements over the course of the last term, said Kelly, was helping steering the development of The Loft, the dedicated youth space at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex, which includes a variety activities where teens can relax.

"We helped design the look and assisted in the equipment decisions," she said. "We made suggestions about the usage and operating hours and we promoted The Loft to the local high schools through social media, putting up posters, and making other announcements. As well, we prepared for and met with the Aurora Optimist Club to discuss building community partnerships."

Before they could get to that point, the first task of the committee was to establish their own vision statement of what they wanted to achieve. According to committee member Stephen McNeil, this included "empowerment" of local youth and giving them a voice. In addition to their efforts with The Loft, this voice extended into local media, including contributions to The Auroran's Teen Zone feature around the March Break period.

Zeroing back in around the Aurora Family Leisure Complex, the committee also spearheaded a Youth Appreciation Day with sponsorship from the Optimists, planned out games, activities and a promotional plan, and were also on hand selling water and pop at last month's Pan Am torch ceremony to raise money for the committee's continued efforts.

"I really liked the opportunity to help out the community and act as a liaison with the Town of Aurora," said Stephen. "It was a great opportunity to volunteer."

For more on Aurora's Youth Engagement Committee, including application forms and a rundown of roles and responsibilities, visit www.aurora.ca/thingstodo/pages/youth-engagement.aspx. Applications must be submitted by 4.30 p.m. on August 31.