

Magic and motorcycles mark milestone for Kerry's Place



By Brock Weir

Families from across York Region gathered in Town Park on Sunday morning to give thanks.

It wasn't a religious service, or a chance to herald the achievements of an individual, but a time to salute the numerous volunteers that make up Kerry's Place Autism Services as the Aurora-based group celebrated its 40th anniversary.

Organized in conjunction with the Aurora Farmers' Market and Art in the Park, revellers were welcomed under the July sun by Market Chair Anna Kroeplin, artist Deborah Campo, Kerry's Place Regional Executive Director Tracy Mansell, and newly-minted Kerry's Place ambassador Stephen Rose for a day of fun.

What a great day to celebrate the phenomenal work and support that Kerry's Place provides to those with autism and their families, said Councillor John Abel, welcoming the group to Town Park on behalf of Council.

Councillor Abel was on hand earlier this year at their Berczy Street headquarters to help welcome Senator Jim Munson to kick off their anniversary year. The Senator has been a very vocal proponent of autism research and strategy and spoke of how impressed he was with the wide-range of services Kerry's Place offers to individuals with autism and their families, regardless of age.

In 2007, the Senate commissioned a ground-breaking report on the autism spectrum, Councillor Abel recalled. Among its many insightful findings, they note autism can cost Canadian families as much as \$60,000 a year for psychological, social and educational services. This is a staggering sum which can place an incredible burden on families, and it is because of this challenge organizations such as Kerry's Place have become truly indispensable.

It makes a difference in the lives of more than 7,000 people with autism while providing needed support to their families. This is a remarkable accomplishment, one which would not be possible without the support and care of many dedicated volunteers. The Town of Aurora is proud and thankful for the decades of service you have provided to our community.

For Newmarket-Aurora MP Lois Brown, Kerry's Place enhances the quality of life for the community as a whole, well beyond the confines of the autism spectrum.

?Not only is Kerry's Place supporting some of the more fragile people who live in our community, but they support some of the most fragile families in our community,? said Ms. Brown. ?The work that you do at Kerry's Place is one of those small things that our community can do to keep families together that are sometimes under tremendous, tremendous pressure. [On behalf of] all those fragile families, I thank you because they represent an enormous amount of people who live here in our community.

?This takes an enormous number of people who are willing to put their time and energy behind bringing awareness to these issues. Many of us do not know the issues that are faced by people in our community who suffer from autism spectrum disorder. I appreciate the awareness this event brings to those of us who sometimes live a life that doesn't take into consideration the kinds of things that happen on a day-to-day basis around us.?

After the formal part of the morning, the fun continued into the afternoon with magic performed at the band shell, punctuated by the roar of nearly 20 motorcycles zooming into Town Park as the Lost Boyz riding club presented Kerry's Place with cheques from their own fundraisers totalling more than \$3,000.