

Movers and shakers raise thousands for Easter Seals kids



By Brock Weir

They have always been known as movers and shakers in Aurora, Newmarket and Bradford, but seven local notables shook what their mamas gave them, raising over \$25,000 for Easter Seals kids.

The inaugural Dancing with the Easter Seals Stars took place at The Manor at Carrying Place last Wednesday, bringing together the talents of Snap'd's Paul Dutton, Royal Woodworking's Donna Gerrits, Neighbourhood Network's Steve Hinder, Councillor Sandra Humfries, Newmarket volunteer Jackie Playter and local businesspeople Mike Rathke and Robin Taylor-Smith for an evening of Foxtrot and Fundraising, under the watchful eyes of dance coaches from Artistica Ballroom Studios and judges Tim Jones, Derek Murray, and Maria Racco.

"I never once expected what happened here tonight when I went three months ago to a couple of businesses in Town to ask them to support kids in their community," said Charlene Myke of Easter Seals, who first proposed the event for Aurora and Newmarket after similar programs had proved to be great successes in other communities. "I never expected the kind of support you have shown Easter Seals children in your community."

For Mr. Hinder, who spoke on behalf of his fellow contestants, stepping up to being put through their gruelling paces by dance coaches Patrick Derry, Kelly Stacey and Anastasia Trutneva, the co-owners of the Aurora-based Artistica, was an obvious choice.

"I think when you're forced to step out of your comfort zone, you're a little bit vulnerable out there," said Mr. Hinder. "We had three amazing people that helped make our lives better because we were very anxious: you were patient with us, you made it fun for us and, apart from a little nerves, we actually ended up looking forward to tonight. I never thought I would say that!"

"When we got to see what everyone else was doing, [we saw] we were all the same. The driving force for all of us was to be able to take some steps for people who couldn't and Easter Seals has meant a lot for us all. We have learned tons through this entire process. These three entrepreneurs today took possession of their own studio in Aurora. I know it is going to take a little while to get things in shape, get them renovated and ready for you, but we're going to help you with the biggest kickoff the Town of Aurora has ever seen!?"

The fun got underway with Ms. Playter taking the floor with Patrick, lindy hopping to Little Richard, wowing the crowd with her energy, which carried her through three performances. Mr. Hinder, with Anastasia, was up next, dancing the Peabody to Crazy in Love.

?He done brought it,? Anastasia joked. ?He has, by far, the best outlook on this whole thing. He didn't know a lick, didn't know a step, but Steve was just amazing.?

Ms. Gerritts, with Patrick, burned up the dance floor with a Cha Cha, which won the enthusiastic approval of Mr. Jones, followed by Mr. Rathke dancing the meringue with Stacy, after which Patrick returned once again with Ms. Taylor Smith for the Foxtrot.

Dressed in Pharrell Williams' signature hat and shorts, Mr. Dutton's salsa got the crowd going while Councillor Humfryes amped up the audience donning a Toronto Blue Jays' jersey for her country-themed two-step with Patrick.

And that was just round one of three!

?We have a number of dancers here tonight and they are all winners,? said Mr. Jones at the outset.

It was just a platitude. While Mr. Dutton took home top prize with the Judge's Choice, Best Choreography, and the Fred & Ginger award, Councillor Humfryes took home the prize for Most Passionate, Mr. Rathke Best Technique, Mr. Hinder Best Energy, Ms. Gerritts Best Sassy, Ms. Taylor Smith Best Creativity, and Ms. Playter Best Entertainer.

?I love dancing, although I am not very good at it at all!? joked Victoria Chen, an Easter Seals Ambassador who entertained the audience with a flute performance. ?When I was almost three I was diagnosed with leukemia. Two months into chemotherapy I lost the mobility in my legs and the doctors didn't know what had caused it. I was later diagnosed with reverse myelitis, a type of spinal cord injury. Dancing was always in my veins and it was a great pleasure to see all the dancers perform tonight.

?Through your generosity we are not limited by our physical incapability but rather filled with heartwarming support enabling us to reach our full potential. We can do just as much as any able-bodied child can and we long for success just as much, if not more.