

Old fashioned tennis in the cards as Historical Society gets out of the red

By Brock Weir

The Aurora Historical Society may have gone for the better part of the last year without a curator on staff but, on the bright side, the local heritage body is ? for now ? out of the red.

The Society (AHS) held their annual general meeting last week looking over the events of the past year, while looking forward to a busy year ahead.

With its chief annual financial contribution coming from the Town of Aurora, the AHS reports a ?significant drop in expenditures? over the last year, partly in relation to staff downsizing, but also as a result of a ?deliberate attempt to live within their means.? Another factor was better than anticipated revenues from several fundraisers held over the course of the last 12 months, including the third annual Hillary House Ball and a scotch tasting event held in conjunction with CHATS (Community and Home Assistance to Seniors).

?We had a very successful year, financially, and we needed a successful year financially,? said Bill Albino, Vice President of the AHS Board of Directors. ?It was important we began to balance our budget. We had a lengthy period of time when we were running in red ink and we were determined not to do that. It ended up that we had to quantify our staff complement, which we did do ? and rather dramatically ? and the result of which is that a couple of our valued staff people were unable to retain employment because we could not offer full time employment.?

Among the exits were curator Catherine Richards, who left to spearhead cultural development for the City of Oshawa. Outside of employment concerns, Mr. Albino cited a 30 per cent improvement in fundraising revenue over 2014, including the scotch tasting and the ball, which he noted has improved in halves year over year.

?The ball is a cornerstone of our fundraising and we have had great support from this room, the community, and it has been a great success ? and it is going to be an even bigger success in the future,? Mr. Albino told the crowd of Historical Society members gathered at the Aurora Cultural Centre.

The AHS also received a portion of the proceeds from the annual Mayor's Charity Golf Classic, the money for which will be used to spruce up Hillary House from the outside, including new lighting and signage.

?We are not out to collect cash, but we certainly feel better with a little more cash in the bank because we have many good uses for it,? Mr. Albino concluded.

The Aurora Historical Society is now looking to a healthy contribution to be a part of celebrations marking this summer's Pan Am and Parapan Games in Toronto. Through a financial infusion from the Games' Community Celebration Fund, the AHS plans to take Hillary House back to its roots as the birthplace of tennis in Aurora.

At the turn of the 20th century, the north lawn of the national historic site was a grass court, which was the founding court of the Aurora Community Tennis Club, which thrives to this day, long ago outgrowing its humble roots. But these roots will be revisited if everything goes according to plan.

?We have applied to Pan Am to restore that court to hold tennis exhibitions at Hillary House in period costumes, with period racquets and balls as a fundraiser and as an interest generator,? said Mr. Albino. ?The fund is meant to be spread around communities like Aurora in the Toronto area to build excitement for the games, and they are looking for linkages to the games.?

Tennis has been a part of the Pan Am Games since 1951 and 1954 silver medallist in the men's singles, Bob Bedard, part of the first class inducted into the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame, has agreed to take part in the exhibition.

?We think it is something with which we can have lots of fun, bring people to Hillary House and put a higher profile to our activities here in Town,? said Mr. Albino.

The Hillary House Ball returns for a fourth year on October 2.