

Showdown finals will provide more chance to take in Hoedown experience

By Brock Weir

People looking to get into the country and western spirit at Hoedown this year will have more opportunities to do so this year with a second night of fun.

While the Hoedown itself, hosted by Magna International, will get underway on Saturday, September 13, under the iconic white tent, there will be fun under the big top on Friday, September 12, as aspiring country musicians face off in the final round of the Hoedown Showdown.

Applications are now being accepted online for rising Canadian country singers. After a long hiatus, the Hoedown Showdown tradition was revived last year to mark the annual party's 25th anniversary.

The success of last year's program left little doubt it had to return for another outing.

"We didn't know what to expect going into it," says Magna's Tanya Moor of last year's planning. "The applications came in slow, but steady, and really came in near the deadline. We were actually quite impressed with how many people applied and we had such a wide range of people from Barrie, to Ottawa, to Burlington."

Last year, preliminary rounds were held at Theatre Aurora, semi-finals at Town Park, and the ultimate finale taking place at Ribfest last year. This year, however, while Theatre Aurora and Ribfest will still host segments of the competition, the ultimate finalists will face off under the main event tent on the eve of Hoedown.

"Preliminaries will be held July 10 where we will pick the top of the crop," explains Ms. Moor. "The semi-finals are September 6 at Ribfest, and then the finals will be at Magna on Friday, September 12. Along with that evening, there will be entertainment, food, and it is going to be a purchase-ticket event."

There will also be a headliner for the Hoedown Showdown, but Ms. Moor remains mum on the details until they can be finalized.

This year, the competition is open to applicants 14-years-of-age or older. With many teens coming out to compete last year, and semi-finalists ultimately stretching from 16 to the 80+, Magna wants to throw open the field and provide more opportunities for younger musicians as well.

"Last year, we found those playing musical instruments seemed to have it all," she says. "They could sing, play an instrument, but that is not necessarily a pre-requisite by any means. It just seems to move the crowd. We had such a wide array of people ranging from 16 to 80 in all different kinds of music and it was really neat to see."

Applications will be accepted through June 15 and can be downloaded at www.hoedown.ca.

Ticket information for Hoedown, and the Hoedown Showdown event, will also be posted on the website.

"People love going into the tent because it is such a large, grand venue and for those unable to go to Hoedown, going to the Showdown finals is a nice alternative."