

SPECIAL *New Year* EDITION

# THE AURORAN

Aurora's Community Newspaper

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[TheAuroran.com](http://TheAuroran.com)

FREE

WEEK OF JANUARY 1, 2026



2025 was a year of milestones and in this, our first edition of 2026, we're looking back at the events and people who helped make the year that was one to remember. Pictured here: Our photographer, Glenn Rodger, trains his lens on a bustling Aurora Town Square from the Treasure Hill Bridge that spans it, as the Aurora Christmas Market unfolded.

Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger

Happy New Year, Aurora!

I hope you all had a wonderful Christmas and holiday season and found time to relax with family and friends. There's something really special about winter in Aurora – lights illuminating our downtown, shiny on our outdoor rinks, snowy walks on our incredible trails.

The year ahead is slated to be another great one for Aurora, and we have many game-changing initiatives in the works. But before looking forward, I want to reflect on the past year, as 2025 was filled with so many big moments and milestones.

## Slabtown Armoury

Few things were more exciting than the Town's partnership with Slabtown Cider Company to take over operations at the historic and cherished Aurora Armoury. And now, with Slabtown Armoury, a new chapter is unfolding with farm-to-table dining, locally crafted cider, and exciting community events for all ages.

I can already picture the summers — people enjoying a meal or a drink on the patio while taking in the sounds from Concerts in the Park. That's what a vibrant downtown looks like: a place that feels alive with energy, and where people come together to have a genuinely great time.

## New Addition at the SARC

For so long, I've heard from parents,



## A Year of Milestones, Moments, & Community Spirit

BY MAYOR TOM MRAKAS

leagues, and community groups that we need more indoor recreation space. And in 2025 we got that done with the new addition to the SARC, featuring an 8,000-square-foot high-school sized gym, new change rooms, a multipurpose room, and more. In Aurora, recreation is a huge part of who we are — it brings us together, builds confidence, supports healthy living, and gives residents of all ages a place to connect. And the new addition to the SARC will serve our community for so many years to come.

## Aurora War Memorial at 100

Aurora has a long and proud military history, which made the 100th anniversary of the Aurora War Memorial this past October especially

meaningful. At Peace Park, alongside community members from Stouffville and King, we honoured the 71 men whose sacrifices are a permanent part of our community's story.

But the day was more than just remembering those who served — it was also about honouring the community members who came together 100 years ago to ensure those sacrifices would never be forgotten.

Over the years, the site has continued to evolve: from the addition of the Altar of Sacrifice in 1960 honouring those lost in the Second World War, to the Korean War Memorial added in 2023. This year, we also installed a new commemorative veterans crosswalk at Yonge Street and Murray Drive — right next to the site — as a simple but meaningful reminder of the values our veterans defended. And next year, a new memorial will be erected dedicated to Indigenous veterans. A century later, the Aurora War Memorial remains a place where our community pauses, reflects, and remembers together.

## Town Square's First Full Year Delivers

By so many measures, the first full year of operations at Town Square has been a resounding success. We've hosted dozens and dozens of outstanding shows and performances, and so many of our community groups have used the space for meetings,

Continued on page 14

As we welcome 2026,  
I wish you a year filled with good health,  
peace, and wonderful possibilities.  
I look forward to continuing to "Open Doors To Your Dreams".

Monica

TOWN OF AURORA

## NOTICE BOARD

January 1, 2026



## Council &amp; Committee Meetings

Date	Time	Location	Meeting
Thursday, January 8	7 p.m.	Video Conference	Committee of Adjustment
Tuesday, January 13	5:45 p.m.	Holland Room	Council Closed Session (if required)
Tuesday, January 13	7 p.m.	Council Chambers	Committee of the Whole
Wednesday, January 14	7 p.m.	Holland Room	Accessibility Advisory Committee
Wednesday, January 14	7 p.m.	School House Mtg Room	Aurora Cultural Centre Board
Thursday, January 15	7 p.m.	Holland Room	Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee

\*Committee of the Whole, Public Planning and Council meetings are available to the public in-person and via live stream on the Town's YouTube channel.



• HAPPY •  
*New Year*  
 From Mayor & Council

Wishing everyone a year filled with happiness, prosperity, and good health. May the new year inspire us to come together with renewed purpose and unite as neighbours, friends, and partners in creating a brighter, stronger future for our community.



**MAYOR AND COUNCIL  
NEW YEAR'S LEVEE**

**Saturday, January 10**

**10 a.m. to 12 p.m.**

Aurora Town Square - 50 Victoria Street

Aurora's Mayor and Council invite you to enjoy:

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## What's Happening



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# BEST OF JANUARY

January celebrations got started a few hours early on December 31 as the Town of Aurora helped residents ring in the New Year at the Town's Family First Night, held at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex before the event moved to Town Square to help celebrate the dawn of 2025. Festivities continued into the first half of January with the Mayor & Council Levee at Town Square. It was a milestone year for the Aurora Cultural Centre as they celebrated their 15th anniversary with a number of celebrations, including a special presentation to local musicians Bonnie and Norbert Kraft, who have spearheaded their Great Artist Music Series. The Centre's showpiece Yamaha piano now bears their name. Over at the Aurora Seniors' Centre, in-house woodworkers celebrated the completion of a new Wood Quilt, a coast-to-coast celebration of Canada, which now takes pride of place in the Centre's main lounge. Creativity also abounded at CHATS as they hosted a Community Arts Showcase featuring paintings, sculptures, handmade jewellery and more. It was the brainchild of Caregiver Education Counsellor Alexis Gada and, for artists, helped renew many of their passions. For sports fans, it was an international showcase at the Aurora Community Centre as the U22 Central York Panthers took on Team China in a friendly tourney.

Auroran photos by Glenn Rodger and Brock Weir



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# BEST OF FEBRUARY

Solemn observances and community celebrations were a hallmark of February in Aurora, including the launch of Black History Month at Town Hall and the presentation of King Charles III Coronation Medals to dozens of community members. Lunar New Year was celebrated with dazzling displays at the Aurora Public Library and at the Aurora Seniors Centre, while the creativity of local Grade 12 graduates was celebrated at the Aurora Cultural Centre at the annual Mayor's Celebration of Youth Art. Aurora Town Square also provided the backdrop for The Women's Health Summit, organized by Kitchen Table CEOs. It was a good month for local sports fans as well as nearly 80 hockey teams came to Aurora to participate in the 26th annual International Silver Stick tournament. On the municipal side of things, the Town once again hosted its Arctic Adventure at Town Park, a popular Family Day tradition, while Mayor Tom Mrakas delivered his State of the Town address at the annual Aurora Chamber of Commerce luncheon, and Council formally appointed Jodi Marr the new CEO of the Aurora Public Library.

Auroran photos by  
Glenn Rodger,  
Brock Weir, and Jim Stewart



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**ENERGY STAR**

**GARAGA EXPERTS**

## THE AURORAN

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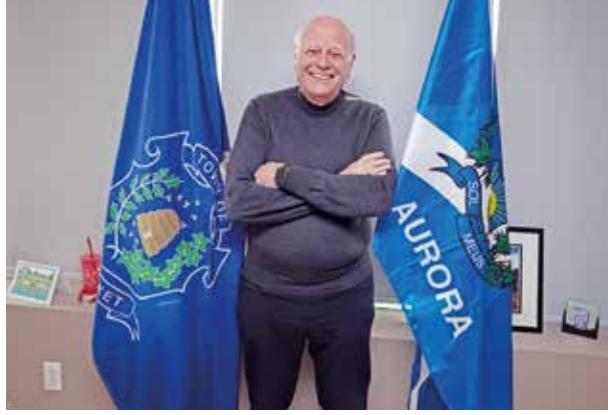
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# BEST OF MARCH

March Break brings some calm to the late-winter rush, but it was a busy month in Aurora. As the Federal election got underway, long-time Newmarket-Aurora MP Tony Van Bynen retired from the political arena. Holi celebrations brought a splash of colour to Aurora Town Square for the very first time. The Library hosted plenty of March Break activities to keep kids busy, including science demonstrations, while young hockey players were also kept busy as the AMHA's Head Start hockey program was celebrated. March is International Women's Day and the occasion was marked in a number of ways throughout the community, including a celebration of 50 years of women officers in the York Regional Police, and the Inspire event hosted by Central York Fire Services. In the historic downtown core, the former Aurora Baptist Church got a new lease on life as home to the Al-Abraar Muslim Association, led by Imam Refaat Mohammed.

Auroran photos by Glenn Rodge, Brock Weir and Selina Loureiro



## 2025 in Review: Advocacy, Accountability, and Community



### MP SANDRA COBENA'S UPDATE

Sandra Cobena, MP  
Newmarket-Aurora

This past year you chose me to represent our community in Ottawa and with that choice you entrusted me a profound responsibility and a tremendous honour.

Every time I have spoken in Parliament or taken action here at home, it has been to reflect our shared priorities.

When families told me that affordability has become their biggest worry, I rose time and again in the Parliament to share your concerns on the cost of living and housing affordability. I also launched the Battle Lines & Budget Lines tour

to discuss how government decisions affect our everyday life.

And when you shared your concerns about the economy, you inspired the Employment and Entrepreneurship Roundtable initiative to be a space where local business owners could openly speak about the pressures they face. I rose these concerns through the questions I brought to the Standing Committee on Finance, because your voice deserves to be heard nationally.

And when so many of you raised alarm about the lack of transparency in federal finances, I launched a petition to stop the budget manipulation to ensure "operating expenses" are not creatively recorded as "capital investments". Canadians know a gas bill is not the same as a mortgage payment; our government should not hand our tax dollars to private corporations through tax refunds and subsidies only to say it is a "capital investment". Canada should continue to comply with international financial reporting standards.

Most importantly, you reminded me that the future depends on those who will inherit it. That is why I created the Youth Advisory Council to be a way to give our children and young leaders the tools, the confidence, and the opportunity to shape the future of Newmarket-Aurora.

But 2025 wasn't only about launching new projects, it was also an opportunity to spend time and build precious moments with a community that I cherish. My first Canada Day

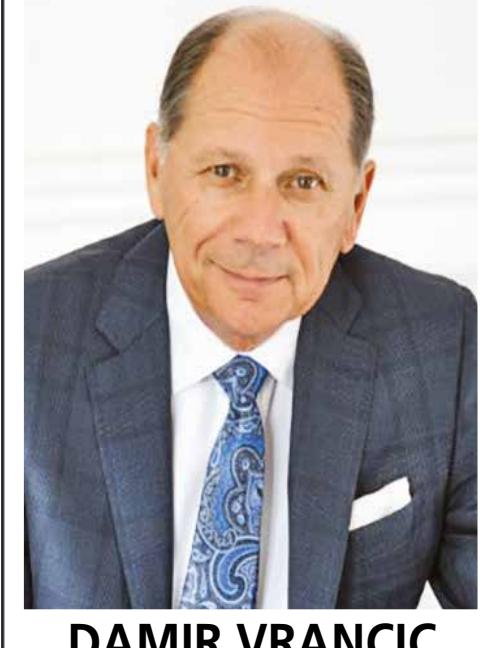
as a Member of Parliament was an unforgettable morning flipping pancakes and handing them to neighbours who stopped not just for breakfast, but to share their worries, their hopes, and their stories.

My visits to retirement homes were equally grounding. They served as a reminder that our seniors built so much of what we enjoy, and I am not talking only about roads or institutions, but also the culture of care, neighbourliness and the subtle resilience that defines Canada at its best. It is our duty to carry this legacy forward, and to continue building with heart and purpose.

And then there are the non-profits whose work shapes the soul of our community. Whether it's Rose of Sharon supporting young mothers as they reclaim their future, or Abuse Hurts offering refuge and dignity to survivors, this type of work requires love, patience and vocation for what they do. To each of them I say: thank you. You make Newmarket-Aurora a kinder, stronger, more hopeful place.

Each event, each story, each person reminded me of something simple and profound: we are a community held together by unity and by a shared belief that Newmarket-Aurora is worthy of our effort, our time, and our best work.

As we close out 2025, I want to thank you for your trust, your feedback, and your belief in what we can build together. I look toward 2026 with optimism, and to continue building long lasting memories in Newmarket-Aurora.



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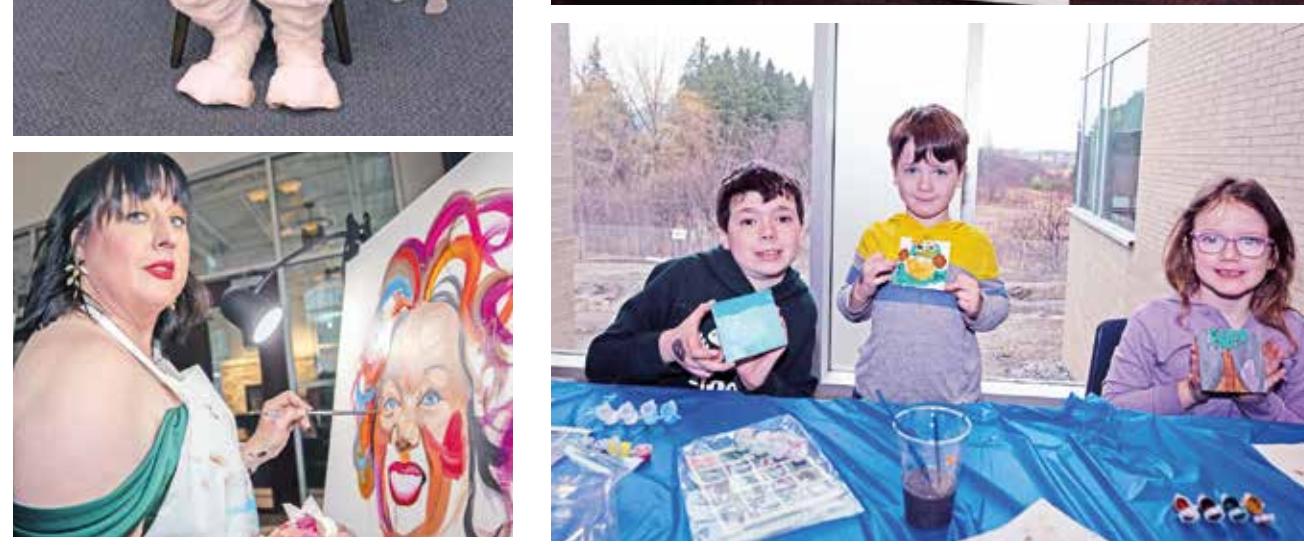
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## BEST OF APRIL

Spring truly sprung throughout Aurora in April as residents got outside and looked to the warmer months ahead. Dedicated volunteers with the Aurora Community Arboretum fanned out through the popular greenspace to make sure it was camera-ready for the influx of walkers, runners, and athletes returning to enjoy the oasis. Over at the Aurora Seniors Centre, the Town of Aurora hosted its annual Easterpalooza which saw the Easter Bunny posing for pictures with attendees. The Easter Bunny also made the rounds to the Royal Canadian Legion, as well as Cousins Park where local residents had organized an Easter Egg Hunt. Over at the SARC, local dignitaries and residents alike gathered to celebrate the opening of the new gymnasium while the nearby Northridge Community Church, home to the Salvation Army, provided the backdrop to the annual Black History Month Gala, hosted by the Aurora Black Community Association. Further up Leslie Street, the Toronto Mets anticipated the completion of their new base, while a bit of Aurora's history was revealed after a time capsule was found during the demolition of George Street Public School.

Auroran photos by  
Glenn Rodger, Brock Weir, Jim Stewart,  
and the Town of Aurora



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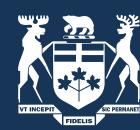
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## BEST OF MAY

As the warm weather arrived, Aurora took the fun into the great outdoors – returning to the Aurora Farmers' Market, to the sports fields, and to Newmarket's Davis Drive, where the annual Run for Southlake was a resounding success. At Town Hall, community heroes were honoured at the annual Community Recognition Awards, while the creativity of the up-and-coming generation was in the spotlight at the annual Youth Innovation Fair. Over at the Royal Canadian Legion, a flag-raising ceremony marked the 80th anniversary of V.E. Day, while moms were celebrated at Hillary House National Historic Site for their annual Mother's Day Tea. The flavours of France were showcased as CHATS hosted its annual Bubbles & Smiles fundraiser with the theme "An Evening in Paris." Creativity continued to flow at Town Hall as the municipality and Society of York Region Artists came together to host their annual Art Sale, while over at the Aurora Cultural Centre, artist Laurence Vallières unveiled a larger-than-life cat as part of her solo sculptural show. It was a gold medal month in the sports community as Shaolin Martial Arts earned seven gold medals hosting the Martial Arts Provincial Championships at the SARC, while the SAS Signets captured seven golds at the inaugural Flight Club Classic Track & Field Meet. Near the end of the month, it was a moving scene at the Royal Venetian Mansion as Omars Shoes celebrated its 55th anniversary with Fashion Thru the Ages, a fashion show benefiting men's health programs at Southlake Health.

Auroran photos by  
Glenn Rodger and Brock Weir



**MICHAEL PARSA, MPP**  
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# BEST OF JUNE

June began on a high note as tens of thousands descended upon Yonge Street for the Aurora Chamber of Commerce's annual Street Festival, but had a tinge of melancholy as graduates at Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School came together to mark the closing of its Dunning Avenue building ahead of its move to the new school on Bayview Avenue and Spring Farm. To celebrate their 40th anniversary, the Optimist Club of Aurora hit the streets, with a fundraising Road Rally. Over at the Lt. Gov. John Graves Simcoe Armoury, Lieutenant Governor Edith Dumont, the King's representative in Ontario, presided over a Change in Command Ceremony, while basketball fans flocked to Aurora Town Square for popular viewing parties. Aurora Town Square also hosted for the first time the Aurora Performing Arts Festival, co-hosted by Marquee Theatrical Productions, where Aurora's 2025 Teen Idol was crowned, and Aurora's first Pride Festival. Another festival was an Aurora first as Royal Rose Gallery organized the Town's inaugural Italian Heritage Festival – but traditions old and new also endured, from the Lions Club's annual Walk for Dog Guides and the Community Garage Sale.

Auroran photos by  
Glenn Rodger and Brock Weir





# Happy New Year Newmarket-Aurora

May the year ahead bring you boundless joy, strengthen our sense of unity, and bless our community with prosperity, peace, and good health.



**DAWN GALLAGHER MURPHY**

MPP for Newmarket-Aurora

Building Our Community Together

905-853-9889

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## DIALOGUE WITH DAWN

By Dawn Gallagher Murphy  
MPP, Newmarket-Aurora

As the year draws to a close, I would like to take a moment to reflect on some of the 2025 hi-lights, and most importantly, to thank YOU for re-electing me as you have put your trust in me for another provincial mandate. It is my greatest honour to represent the people of Newmarket-Aurora, and I am humbly grateful every day for the opportunity to serve this incredible community.

Firstly, I would like to hi-light two of my annual major events that brings our community together:

- Senior's Expo – 2nd annual event was a wonderful opportunity to recognize and support our seniors through informative educational sessions, and connecting with local service providers who provide so many opportunities for seniors to stay connected within our community.
- Community BBQ – 4th annual event provided a fun-filled afternoon for families to congregate, enjoy great food, and celebrate the vibrant spirit of our riding.

These events allow me to connect with YOU and are a reminder of how strong and engaged our community truly is.

Advocacy for the needs of our community has brought significant investments to Newmarket-Aurora this year:

- More than \$46 million has been

directed to Southlake Health to help strengthen health care for families...this includes investments in emergency care, psychiatric services, diagnostic operating services, and hospital operations.

- Over \$1 million into the York Region Mental Health and Community Care Centre, to support the first year of facility and start-up costs.
- An outstanding investment from the province's "Last Mile Funding" of more than \$2.3 million for the redevelopment of Blue Door's Gorham St. project, to \$630,000 for the new Inn From the Cold (IFTC) shelter and transitional housing facility on Yonge St., an additional \$170K through the Ontario Trillium Foundation to help IFTC install fully accessible features in the new facility, like an elevator and washrooms. I am proud to be part of a government that prioritizes investments to address homelessness and provide safe, stable housing solutions for our more vulnerable community members.
- More than \$6.1 million through the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund to support Aurora and Newmarket's critical infrastructure needs. Since this fund was established in 2021, a total of more than \$34.3 million has been invested in our two municipalities to keep roads, bridges, and water systems safe while strengthening our communities for future growth.
- Close to \$850K to open a new primary care clinic. More than 2,300 patients in Newmarket-Aurora who need a primary care healthcare provider now have access. This is where our healthcare system starts... connecting families with the

health support they need close to home. Call now to book your appointment today at 289-903-3555. Learn more at [nyssoto.ca/primary-care-clinic/](http://nyssoto.ca/primary-care-clinic/)

- \$3.8 million invested through the Skills Development Fund Training Stream to help youth and adults gain the skills needed for good-paying, in-demand jobs. Thank you to STEM Minds Aurora and Boreal Farms, as well as Fair Chance Learning for developing programs that have and continue to make a difference in people's lives.
- \$255K through the CCTV Grant program to help York Regional Police expand video surveillance that targets areas affected by gun, gangs, and drug activity, helping police prevent crime and keep communities safe.
- \$1,528,000 total investment through the Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence to local organizations, BridgeNorth, Go Thrive Go, and Abuse Hurts. Their commitment to supporting survivors of gender-based violence and their contributions to promoting the safety and well-being of all Ontarians is making a difference in people's lives every day.

A true milestone for our Francophone community was achieved this year with the announcement of the sale of provincial surplus lands in Aurora to the Communauté du Trille Blanc. This land will be used to begin the construction of a 160 bed Long Term Care Home, housing, and recreation space for the creation of a new Francophone Village. The province is committed to expanding culturally appropriate long term care ensuring resident-directed, safe, quality care that responds to a resident's physical, psychological, emotional, social,

spiritual, and cultural goals, and needs.

Throughout 2025, our community came together to celebrate a variety of cultural and community events, including the Chinese New Year, Black History Month, Holi Festival, York Pride, Emancipation Day, Run for Southlake, Iftar Dinner, and Rosh Hashanah. I also had the privilege of visiting local businesses, hosting roundtables on skilled trades, and participating in discussions on multiculturalism with community leaders and the Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism, ensuring the voices of our local businesses and non-profit/faith-based groups are all heard at Queen's Park.

For the third time, I was proud to receive unanimous support in the Ontario Legislature on a Private Member's business initiative. Building on previous successes from proclaiming June as Seniors Month in Ontario to advancing the transparent and ethical use of Artificial Intelligence in government, this year's motion on modernizing the approval process for communal water/wastewater systems for small and rural communities including those in York Region, demonstrates the ongoing collaboration of all parties to support initiatives that directly benefit our communities.

My commitment to the residents of Newmarket-Aurora, to listen to YOU, to advocate for the needs of our community, to be a strong voice at Queen's Park that will work within our government to achieve real tangible results...results that will make our community stronger, safer, more inclusive, and healthier.

My constituency office is here to help. I encourage any constituent with questions or concerns to reach out to 905-853-9889 or email me at [dawn.gallaghermurphy@pc.ola.org](mailto:dawn.gallaghermurphy@pc.ola.org)

From my family to yours, I wish you a truly blessed year ahead. May 2026 bring you good health, great happiness, and prosperity.

MERRY  
*Christmas*  
& HAPPY  
*New Year*



**COSTAS MENEGAKIS**

MP | AURORA—OAK RIDGES—RICHMOND HILL

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Year!Let's make  
2026  
the best  
one yet!

# BEST OF Arts & Culture

## A Transformative Year of Culture, Community, and Connection

By Samantha Mahoney  
Town of Aurora

2025 marked the first full year of operations at Aurora Town Square, and the impact has been remarkable. Since opening in fall 2024, this visionary space has strengthened Aurora's downtown, expanded access to arts and heritage, and brought people together through hundreds of performances, programs, workshops, exhibitions, and special events.

Designed as a place where culture, creativity, and community intersect, Aurora Town Square has exceeded expectations. With an average of 8,400 monthly visitors—over 100,800 visitors this year alone—Town Square has become a vibrant gathering place for residents and visitors of all ages. Whether stopping in for a performance, connecting with neighbours over a coffee, or exploring the latest exhibitions, visitors are embracing Town Square as a destination that enriches daily life.

### A Year of Milestones and Firsts

From live performances to cultural celebrations and educational programs, Town Square's first full year offered the community countless opportunities to connect, learn, and celebrate together. Among the most memorable milestones were several first-time celebrations that highlighted Aurora's diversity and vibrancy. Town Square hosted its



Musician Moshe Hammer's farewell tour brought him and pianist Angela Park to Brevik Hall, part of Aurora Town Square's historic Church Street School, this fall as the Aurora Cultural Centre hosted its Great Artist music series.

Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger

inaugural Holi and Diwali festivities, drawing intergenerational crowds and showcasing the growing cultural richness of the community. In June, Town Square came together with community partners to host Aurora's first Pride Festival.

The year also saw a surge in educational and performing arts programming. Over 150 elementary students participated in Aurora Museum & Archives' school programs, gaining meaningful opportunities to explore Aurora's heritage. In the Davide De Simone Performance Hall, audiences enjoyed comedy, film screenings, theatre, live music spanning many genres, sporting screenings, and much more—demonstrating the venue's versatility and the strong local appetite for diverse live experiences. Over 3,000 community members enjoyed programs offered by the Town of Aurora and

Aurora Cultural Centre, while countless others attended events hosted by third-party organizations.

Community response has been overwhelmingly positive. Across program quality, diversity of offerings, box office experience, facility maintenance, customer service, and overall programming, satisfaction scores averaged 4.7 out of 5. Remarkably, 95 per cent of post-event survey respondents indicated they would recommend Town Square's programs—demonstrating the meaningful role the hub now plays in the cultural and social life of Aurora.

### Looking Ahead to 2026

Following the momentum of 2025, Town Square is set to strengthen its role as a leading hub for local arts, culture, heritage, and community connection in 2026. We will introduce new programs and experiences designed to engage residents and visitors of all ages, from hands-on Museum workshops like Photo

Digitization, to a nostalgic Flashback Film Series, and a calendar full of exhibitions, live performances, cultural events, and school programs.

Partnerships continue to be a cornerstone of Town Square's success, creating opportunities that enrich community life, support local businesses, and strengthen Aurora's cultural sector. Through collaboration with local organizations, arts groups, and community partners, Town Square will continue to bring the community together in meaningful ways—ensuring the space remains a hub for creativity, learning, and connection.

As we move into the new year, Aurora Town Square will continue to define the cultural and social heart of downtown Aurora. For a full list of upcoming performances, events, and workshops, visit [aurora.ca/WhatsOn](http://aurora.ca/WhatsOn). Stay connected by following Town Square on Facebook and Instagram (@AuroraTownSquare) and subscribing to our monthly e-newsletter.

## Fireside chat with Mayor and Council part of New Year's Levee

BY BROCK WEIR  
EDITOR  
LOCAL JOURNALISM  
INITIATIVE REPORTER

The Town of Aurora is hitting the ground running in this New Year by hosting Aurora's annual New Year's Levee at Town Square.

This year's levee, which is a Canadian tradition, is an opportunity for leaders at all levels of government to meet with citizens, hear their concerns, and simply have a good time. Aurora is no exception and the traditional has endured—for many years hosted at the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex, but now, for the second year in a row, at Aurora Town Square.

The levee is set for Saturday, January 10, from 10 a.m. to 12 noon and will begin with a Meet & Greet with Mayor and Council and public skating in the outdoor rink beginning at 10 a.m.

"Mayor Mrakas and Aurora Town Council invite the community to join in the annual New Year's Levee—a cherished tradition that brings our community together in a festive setting," said the Town of Aurora. "Enjoy a day filled with family-friendly activities, including ice skating, a delicious pancake breakfast, balloon twisting, and more! It's the perfect opportunity to connect with neighbours, share in winter fun, and welcome the year ahead with joy and togetherness."

"Levee's date back prior to the 17th Century and are still a celebrated tradition today in a variety of formats. The traditional and historical purpose of a Levee was for the leaders (Kings or Queens of the time) to address their nation, providing a positive outlook

at the year ahead. Today's Levees are held in the form of an open house. Traditionally the Lieutenant Governor's Levee is held in the morning, whereas a Mayor's Levee in the afternoon. The intent of this tradition is to show the government's commitment to providing the best service for the community with a note of good cheer either on January 1, or on any day during the month of January."

As she put the final touches on the 2026 Levee as the year that was coming to a close, Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora, said this year's event will build on the success of 2025's, when the Levee shifted to its new home at Yonge and Church Streets.

"What was nice is there were a lot of new faces that attended this versus our traditional events," says Ware. "We're going to have a fireside chat with the Mayor and members of Council up on stage in the Performance Hall; last year was the first time we did this and it turned out really, really special and we've continued with the format for this year."

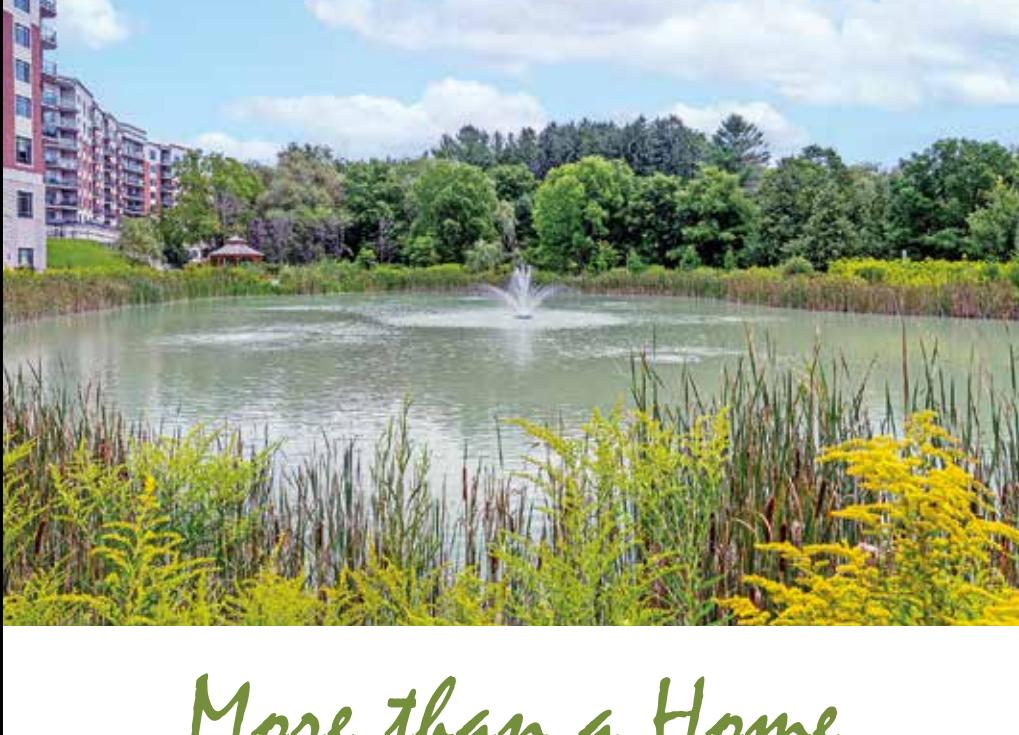
"It was a great opportunity for the community to ask any questions they wanted to ask of the Mayor and members of Council. There were some really, really unique questions that came up, as well as some expected ones, but it truly is an opportunity to meet with your Council as well as Mayor in a really supportive community atmosphere."

For more information on 2026's Mayor & Council New Year's Levee, visit [www.aurora.ca/levee](http://www.aurora.ca/levee).

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# THE AURORAN

Sports • News • Coming Events  
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## 2025 Sports Highlights in The Auroran

BY JIM STEWART

Here are some of the many impressive achievements of local sports teams, elite individual athletes, and highlights of sports events connected to Aurora in 2025.

Despite some very daunting international developments in 2025, the past twelve months have included significant and uplifting sporting moments that were a pleasure to report to our readers.

Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays, and Happy New Year from the Sports Department of The Auroran.

### January

**St. Andrew's College Saints defeated the Bishop Kearney School Selects 3-2 to win the 41st MacPherson Hockey Tournament**

Power forward Alex Carscadden fired the overtime winner much to the delight of over 1,000 spectators who packed the LaBrier Family Arena for the showdown between the Saints and Selects—a replay of the 2024 Final between the Aurora prep school and the visitors from Rochester, NY.

The Saints defended their championship due to the timely heroics of Carscadden. The Princeton University commit made a strong move to the net off of the right circle and snapped the puck past Selects keeper Sammy Doyon-Cataquiz with 8:41 left in three-on-three overtime.

Carscadden's game-winner, his first of the tourney, caused a pile-on celly at centre ice. After the 6'1" inch forward was extricated from the heap of humanity, he described the thrill when the puck crossed the line.

"I suddenly realized I scored the OT winner. It felt amazing. Winning the tournament is so amazing. It's the biggest goal I've ever scored. Never scored an OT winner."

Tournament MVP Kieren Dervin described the impact of defending their 2024 championship: "It's a special tournament for all of us. To beat Bishop Kearney in back-to-back years is an accomplishment. It's something I'm never going to forget."

The leading scorer at the 41st MacPherson was emotional about being selected MVP: "It's such an honor. So many good kids have won this award. To win this the year after Dean Letourneau won it last year makes this even more special for me. Dean was such a great player here."

### February

**Junior Panthers' heater reaches ten with weekend wins over Windsor Wildcats and Bluewater Hawks**

The Junior Panthers rolled through southwestern Ontario and demonstrated to the OWHL that their U22 hockey team can win in vastly different ways.

The red-hot Panthers shellacked the

Windsor Southwest Wildcats 10-0. On Sunday afternoon, Central York travelled to Strathroy and edged the Bluewater Hawks 2-1 in an overtime thriller at the Gemini Sportsplex. The pair of road victories extended the Panthers' winning streak to ten games and improved their eighth-place record to 26-10-0-3 in the 25-team loop.

Central York Coach Mark Dubeau expressed a degree of disappointment with the club only taking five of the six points available, but acknowledged that the Junior Panthers were facing a desperate Hawks team on Sunday afternoon.

"It was a bit disappointing to only take five of the six points on the road trip. We ran out of gas in Strathroy. Bluewater is fighting to get in the playoffs and they had a little more urgency at times. They upset Stoney Creek 1-0 on Saturday so we knew it was going to be a challenge."

In Sunday's narrow victory over the Hawks, Cheyenne Degeer's unassisted power play goal with 9:34 left in the first period opened the scoring for the Panthers. Degeer's league-leading 33rd of the season moved her back into second place in the OWHL scoring race, three points behind Maxine Cimoroni of the Mississauga Hurricanes.

### March

**Aurora's Ryan Nembhard and the Gonzaga Bulldogs Advance to "The Sweet Sixteen" as March Madness Consumes Local Sports Fans**

Point guard Ryan Nembhard and the NCAA Gonzaga Bulldogs are off to "The Sweet Sixteen" with a decisive 89-68 win over the #4-seeded Kansas Jayhawks in Salt Lake City on Saturday afternoon.

Nembhard's persistent performance versus the Jayhawks was noted by The Associated Press: "Making all the Bulldogs look good was Ryan Nembhard who blew off a rough shooting night (1 for 6) and finished with 12 assists."

The Aurora-born NCAA star broke Gonzaga's single-season assist record (235) on Saturday.

Nembhard joined Gonzaga through the Transfer Portal in Summer, 2023 after playing two seasons for the Creighton University Blue Jays.

In Gonzaga's first game in the "March Madness" tournament, Nembhard's 5th-seeded Bulldogs trounced McNeese State 86-65. The graduate of St. Jerome Elementary School in Aurora compiled 8 points, 9 assists, 2 rebounds, and 1 steal in the "Round of 64" win over the 12th-seeded Cowboys.

### April

**Aurora Swimmer Madison Russell Commits to Nova Southeastern University Sharks in Florida**

Aurora resident and Newmarket Stingray Madison Russell has signed her letter of intent to attend Nova Southeastern

University in Fort Lauderdale FL.

Matt Morris, Athletic Director at Bolles School in Jacksonville, FL, announced that seven of the prep school's student-athletes, including Russell, "committed to their post-secondary destinations and signed their letters of intent at an in-school ceremony on April 17."

Bolles School Sharks Assistant Swim Coach Claire Mills praised Russell's performances in the pool this season: "Maddie qualified for the USA Swimming Futures Championships in the 100 breaststroke at Sectionals in February. This past weekend at a Sprint meet in Town, she swam her 2nd best times ever in the 100 breaststroke and 200 breaststroke."

### May

**Over 650 youth rugby players compete in Aurora Barbarians' annual Mini Youth Festival**

670 rugby players braved windy and cool conditions at Sheppard's Bush and St. Maximilian Kolbe CHS to compete ardently in the Aurora Barbarians' annual Mini Youth Festival.

The 57-team Festival featured squads from across the GTA including the Caledon Cavaliers, Markham Irish, Barrie RC, Toronto Nomads, Oshawa Vikings, Ajax Wanderers, Burlington Centaurs, Toronto City RC, and the host Barbarians which fielded nine teams in the two-site tournament.

With the aroma of Harvey's grilled burgers wafting through the Barbarians' tent, President Steve Hall was pleased by the level of participation in this year's tournament: "We've got almost 700 players out here today—U6-U12 teams are here at Sheppard's Bush and a U14 tournament is being run at St. Max."

Hall explained the purposes of the annual tournament that started as a modest event, but has expanded into one of the top youth festivals endorsed by Rugby Ontario: "It's about giving back—passing on a love of the game from the older generation to kids. It's also about fresh air, friendships, and teamwork. Rugby is a game for life. I've been playing it for 45 years and still have the friends I made through the sport."

### JUNE

**Legendary Cameraman and Sportsbeat Aurora co-creator Steve Mitchell passes away at 61**

Aurora's beloved videographer Steve Mitchell, who recorded decades of Aurora Tigers Junior A games and co-created the popular program Sportsbeat Aurora which ran on Aurora Cable TV for 26 years, passed away at Southlake Regional Health Centre. He was 61.

Mitchell videotaped Junior A hockey teams—including the Aurora Tigers—for Aurora Cable from 1979 to 2008. He became a station manager of Aurora Cable in 1983 and served in that capacity

until Rogers bought ACI in 2008. Mitchell continued to serve as cameraman at Aurora Tigers games for 10 more years until declining health reduced his workload in the broadcast booth.

During his illustrious career behind the camera, Mitchell videotaped thousands of Junior A hockey games and the gondola at the Aurora Community Centre is named the Steve Mitchell Media Box in his honour. The ice at ACC Rink 1 may have been out for the summer, but a trip inside the venerable arena reveals Steve Mitchell's historical effect on Aurora hockey. Framed by the Aurora Tigers' national championship banners from 2004 and 2007, the Steve Mitchell Media Booth at the ACC serves as a testament to his impact not only on the Tigers, but on the Town's sporting culture.

A significant part of the Town's sporting culture is Aurora Tigers' President and Owner Jim Thomson. The former NHLer was moved by Mitchell's passing: "It was a real sad day when his daughter Jennifer called me. Steve was so well-loved and respected throughout the league. He was our cameraman and was so loyal to the Tigers. He was there every game—when he couldn't be, his daughter Jennifer would take over. He was so very dear to me and dear to the Tigers."

**PGA veteran Morland makes triumphant return to win 3rd Annual Aurora Sports Hall of Fame Golf Tournament at Pheasant Run**

It's was a banner month for the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame.

Not only did the venerable organization announce its four inductees for its Class of 2025 at Town Hall, but it also welcomed over 100 golfers to the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame's Third Annual Golf Tournament in optimal conditions on Thursday afternoon at Pheasant Run.

ASHOF President and Chair Javed S. Khan and Chair of the Induction Committee Melanie Pearson announced that Erlinda Biondic (Athlete—Running), Heather Morning (Coach—Ice Hockey), Kris King (Athlete—Hockey), and Robert Reid (Athlete—Football) will be enshrined at the 12th Annual Induction Celebration at the Royal Venetian Mansion on November 6 with Rod Black confirmed as Emcee.

To add an exclamation point to the midweek proceedings, Class of 2018 inductee David Morland IV returned from Florida to compete in the Scramble and led his team to victory with a stellar collective score of 59. Morland—who competed in 120 events on the PGA Tour, including two US Opens—teamed up with legendary CFTO sports broadcaster Joe Tilley, and Newmarket Hyundai sponsors Tony Degobbo and Brayden Micucci to secure bragging rights for a year.

2025's Sports Highlights will continue in next week's edition.



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## BEST OF JULY

July was an active – and patriotic – month through Aurora as the community kicked it off with a series of events celebrating Canada Day, including a parade up Yonge Street, featuring a convoy of Council and Citizen of the Year Sandy Bundy, and a full afternoon of activities at Lambert Willson Park. Celebrations continued as the Aurora Cultural Centre launched its 2025-2026 Performing Arts Season with a special showcase in the Aurora Town Square Performance Hall, the Optimist Club of Aurora marked its 40th anniversary year by participating in a Bed Race in Georgina, and Student Athletes of the Year were honoured by Sport Aurora at Town Park. Also at Town Park, the Aurora Farmers' Market continued apace with several activities, including a live painting demonstration by Rose Zhao ahead of her exhibition at the Cultural Centre. While it was a month to celebrate up and coming athletes, it was a time for mourning and memories in the community as with the death of Sportsbeat Aurora co-creator and camera man Steve Mitchell, while the memory of late Deputy Mayor John Abel was furthered with the installation of distinctive wood carvings by artist Bobbi Switzer at the park that now bears his name.

Auroran photos by Glenn Rodger, Jim Stewart, Brock Weir, and Diane Buchanan



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# BEST OF AUGUST

August sizzled throughout Aurora this month as the mercury rose and the Town hosted the tastiest event of the year. Ribfest brought thousands to Machell Park for a weekend of live music, family fun, and, of course, meat right off the grill. Town Park saw its fair share of action as well, with the launch of Movies in the Park and the continued draw of Concerts in the Park, which ran each Wednesday in July and August, and the Community Corn Roast, part of the Aurora Farmers' Market, which saw Mayor and Council taking over the grill. It was a time for celebrations large and small as community leaders marked Emancipation Day at Aurora Town Square, announced a new village for Francophone seniors would be constructed in the northwest quadrant of Yonge Street and Bloomington Road, and a deal which will see additional public land come to the Town of Aurora; and as the Aurora United Church closed a chapter in their storied history – reinterring the remains of nearly 200 of the Town's earliest pioneers at Aurora Cemetery.

Auroran photos by Glenn Rodger and Brock Weir



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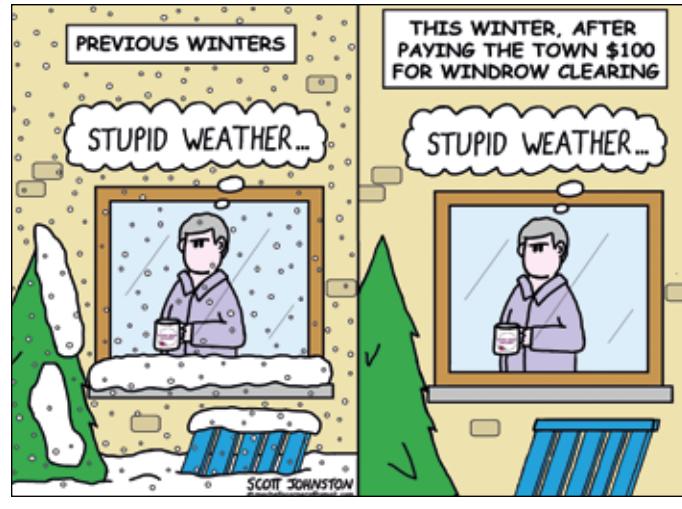
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# BEST OF MACHELL'S CORNERS

A YEAR THROUGH THE EYES OF

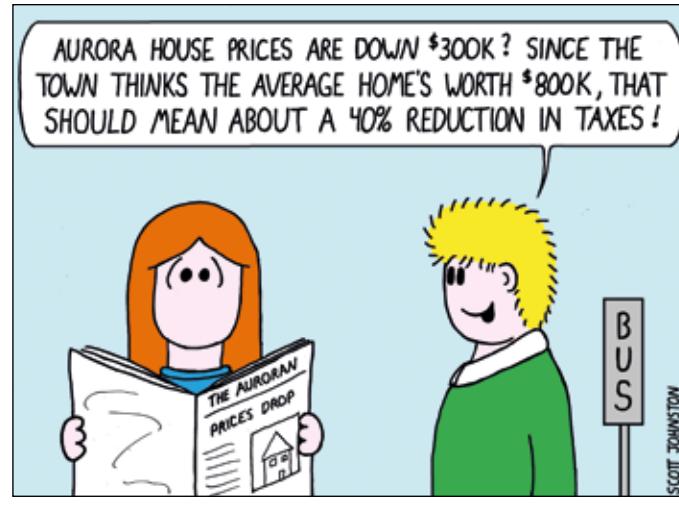
*Scott*  
JOHNSTON



At the beginning of every winter eligible residents need to guess whether it'll be a snowy winter or not, and therefore whether it's worthwhile to pay the Town for windrow clearing.



Tariffs and threats to Canada's sovereignty coming from south of the border early in 2025 resulted in a huge push to support our country's workers and economy.



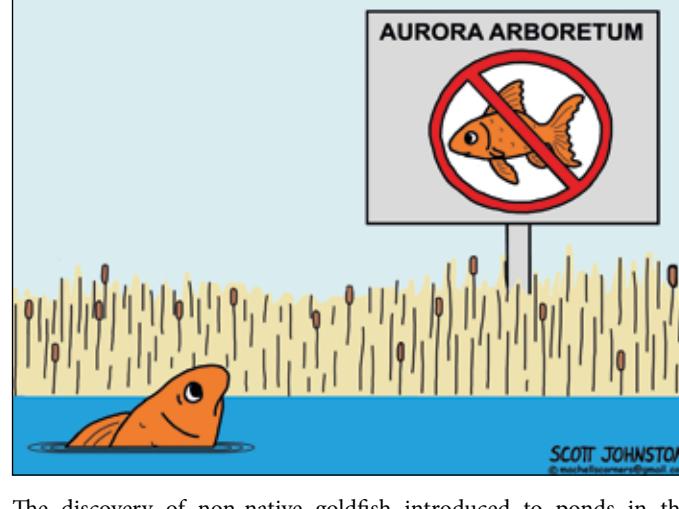
For several years at tax time the Town has used the benchmark of an average Aurora home being worth \$800,000. Since the average price is now about twice that, the Town is suggesting annual tax increases that are about half what most residents will pay.



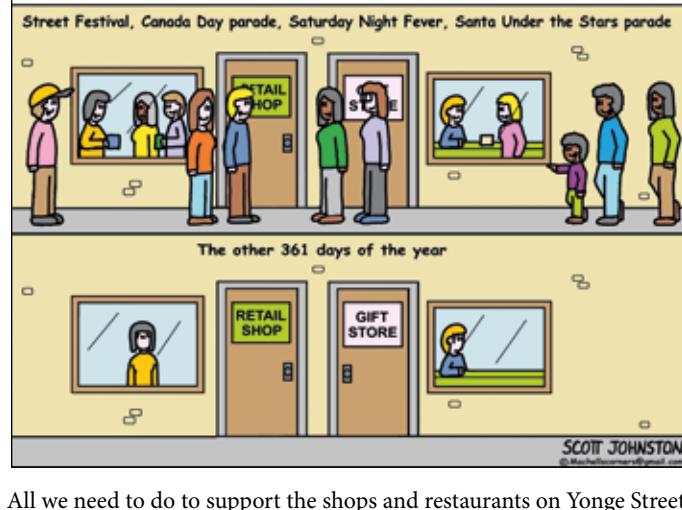
As a cartoonist, it was fun to have an excuse to include the Peanuts gang when Strong Mayor Powers overturned another council majority vote.



Aurorans may find it inconvenient at times getting to our local hospital, but it'll be even more of a challenge when Southlake moves to one of the shortlisted sites in East Gwillimbury, Bradford or Georgina.



The discovery of non-native goldfish introduced to ponds in the Arboretum was not good news for the local plants, fish, amphibians and invertebrates that they will inevitably displace.



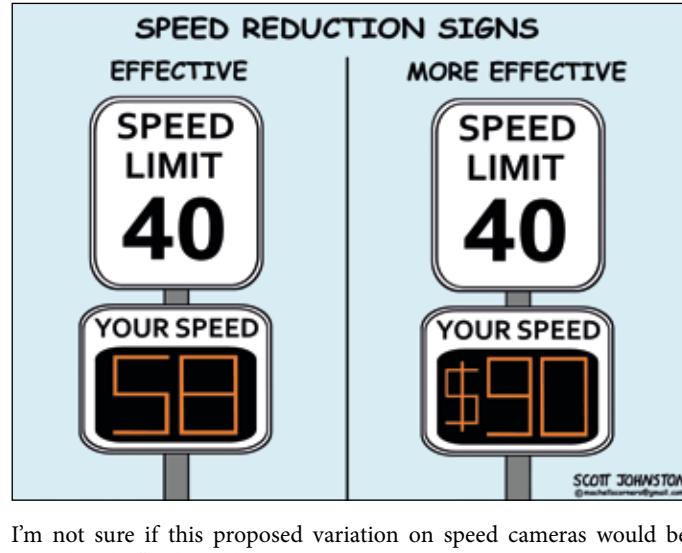
All we need to do to support the shops and restaurants on Yonge Street is to start shopping there, or create festivals and events that cover the other 361 days of the year.



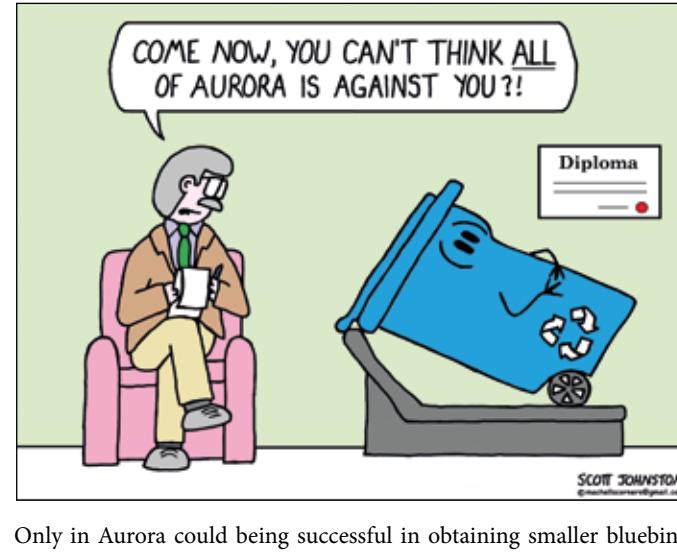
My most popular cartoon this year. Not surprising, as we all love the Farmers' Market.



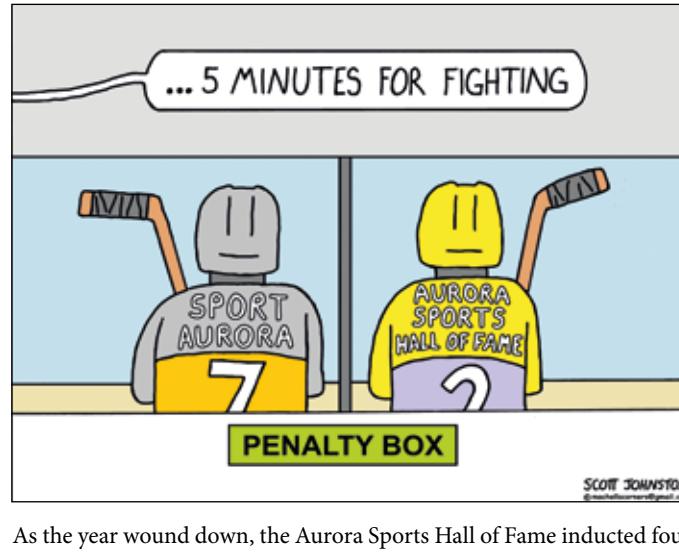
With our luck the parking study will suggest there's too much of it in Town.



I'm not sure if this proposed variation on speed cameras would be considered a "cash grab".



Only in Aurora could being successful in obtaining smaller bluebins that other municipalities already use, while accepting less frequent collection, be considered a win.



As the year wound down, the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame inducted four new members, but made headlines for its very public squabble with Sport Aurora.

## A Year of Milestones, Moments, & Community Spirit

From page 1

conferences, and events.

And what's even more encouraging is the feedback: our post-event surveys show an average enjoyment rating of 4.64 out of 5, and 95 per cent of respondents said they would recommend the show they attended. We also kept that momentum going earlier this year by welcoming My Indie Coffee as the new café operator. More people than ever are dropping by to simply grab a coffee, meet a friend, and enjoy the incredible ambiance of the space. Town Square has truly become the central community gathering place we envisioned.

### A Year of Shared Sports Moments

When Aurora's own Andrew Nembhard and the Indiana Pacers made it to the NBA Finals, we hosted outdoor viewing events at Town Square. When the Women's Rugby World Cup Final came around, we hosted viewing parties inside to cheer on members of the Aurora Barbarians Rugby Football Club who were part of the action. And there was no way we weren't going to do it again when our beloved Blue Jays made it to the World Series. All of it reminded me that community is not only built through projects, but through the special moments we share together.

### Looking Ahead to 2026

Everything we worked on in 2025 was rooted in building a stronger community – and that will only continue in 2026. You will see upgrades to parks and playgrounds, including Atkinson Park, Fleury Park, and Optimist Park. We'll keep improving trails, including the Benjamin Pearson Parkette boardwalk, and new connections on Mattamy, DeGraff and Shining Hill trails. We will make improvements to many of our Town facilities, as well as to our roads and sidewalks. We will continue moving forward with the Yonge Street streetscape redesign, a key part

of the long-term revitalization of our downtown, while continuing to bring people together through the community events Aurora is known for – including more viewing events in 2026, with the World Cup on the calendar.

All of this work will move us forward, and it builds directly on the incredible year we just shared together.

So, thank you Aurora, for an incredible 2025. It continues to be an honour to serve as your Mayor, and I'm looking forward to what we will accomplish together in 2026. I wish you and your family a safe, healthy, and very Happy New Year.

# BEST OF SEPTEMBER

July is typically the month for all things Canada, but September came a close second as the Town hosted its annual Saturday Night Fever event. This year's street party, which saw Yonge Street closed between Yonge and Mosley Streets, was re-dubbed Maple Leaf Fever, and featured an all-Canadian lineup of tribute artists paying homage to all-Canadian artists. It was a good month for the great outdoors as hundreds took to the Aurora Community Arboretum for the annual Terry Fox Run, the opening of Thelma Fielding Park, the new artificial turf fields at St. Anne's School and Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School, and the Farmers' Market reached the penultimate month of its outdoor season. On the cultural side of things, history lovers both here at home and further afield welcomed Aurora's return to Doors Open, Aurora's annual Multicultural Festival took over both Town Park and Aurora Town Square, long-time local business owner Revi Mula released her first novel, The Red Apple, based on her grandparents' experiences fleeing war, and Theatre Aurora opened its 2025-2026 season with Rodgers & Hammerstein's A Grand Night for Singing. Andy Comar and Lorraine Newton Comar, who guided Aurora United Church through its devastating fire, formally retired after nearly two-decades of community service. Poignantly, the month ended with National Day for Truth & Reconciliation with a gathering at Town Square at which Traditional Anishinaabe Grandmother Kim Wheatley, pictured here with Mayor Mrakas, presided.

Auroran photos by Glenn Rodger and Brock Weir





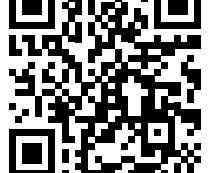
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## BEST OF OCTOBER

October might be the spookiest month, but there was plenty to be thankful for as Thanksgiving approached, not the least of which were the Colours of Fall Concert and the Toronto Blue Jays getting oh-so-close to another World Series Championship. Southlake Health had plenty to be thankful for as well after Whisky, Wine & MR Menswear and storeowner Mike Rathke raised more than \$100,000 for local cancer care at a fashion show featuring Southlake physicians. Community leaders once again laced up for the annual Dancing with the Easter Seals Stars Aurora-Newmarket, which raised more than \$100,000 for Easter Seals. This event took place at the Royal Venetian Mansion, which was also the scene of the Aurora Chamber of Commerce's Business Excellence Awards. Aurora's iconic Cenotaph marked its first 100 years with an afternoon service and a reception at the Royal Canadian Legion. As Halloween fever approached, Starlight Canada hosted its annual Halloween event for children and families in need at Microtel and the Town of Aurora marked the 20th anniversary of its ever-popular Haunted Forest.

Auroran photos by  
Glenn Rodger and Brock Weir



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# BEST OF NOVEMBER

It was a month of reflection and celebration this month as poignant Remembrance events gave way to holiday anticipation. October ended and November began with a series of flag raisings at Town Hall, Town Park, the Royal Canadian Legion and more to signal the start of the Legion's annual Poppy Campaign and Remembrance Week activities leading up to November 11. An unseasonable cold snap brought snow to both Legion-hosted services at the Cenotaph, where hundreds of residents came out to pay tribute to the fallen. Additional Remembrance events included a special dinner at the Legion and the screening of *We Land A Hand: The Story of Ontario's Farmerettes* at Aurora Town Square – which brought long-time Aurora resident, and Farmerette, Joan Hill Tovey. As the community remembered, the sports community came out in droves for the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame's annual Induction Dinner as it welcomed the Class of 2025: Erlinda Biondic, Kris King, Robert Reid, and Heather Morning. As Remembrance Day 2025 entered history, the spirit of the season descended on Aurora with the annual Santa Under the Stars Parade, the launch of Theatre Aurora's inaugural Christmas Pantomime, entitled *Totally Scrooged*, the Aurora Community Band's annual Christmas Market at Trinity, and the launch of the Oakridge Fashions' Giving Shop.

Auroran photos by Glenn Rodger



As we reflect on the past year, I want to extend my sincere gratitude to all of you, the people of Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill. Since my election in April, your support, trust, and generosity have been truly inspiring and meaningful. Serving as your Member of Parliament is an honour, and I am reminded each day of the privilege of representing such a dedicated and resilient community.

Over the past year, I have had the opportunity to travel throughout our riding, meeting so many remarkable individuals whose dedication, optimism, and resilience embody the very best of Canada. I have visited new businesses as they opened their doors, witnessed community leaders launch crucial initiatives, and met volunteers and organizations that pour their time, energy, and hearts into making our community stronger. These moments, seeing dreams become reality, and witnessing grassroots leadership in action, have been among the most rewarding experiences of my time in office so far.

My office is the people's office, and I am grateful to every individual and every group who reaches out to discuss the issues that matter to them. I welcome these conversations wholeheartedly. In Ottawa, I have had the honour of serving on the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. This work is deeply meaningful to me. As someone who was born in Canada of parents who immigrated here in the 1950s, I carry a personal understanding of the values, hopes, and responsibilities that come with choosing Canada as one's home. My family's story shapes my belief in the importance of preserving the integrity of our immigration system and the value of our Canadian passport. For that reason, I have been advocating for stronger security measures, enhanced criminal background checks, and a process that reflects both compassion and accountability.

Beyond committee work, I have continued



## COSTAS' CORNER

MP Costas Menegakis  
Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill

### A Year in Review and Hope for the Future

to raise concerns about issues that affect people across our riding and across the country, particularly affordability, public safety, and the growing pressures on families simply trying to make ends meet. Many of you have shared personal stories about rising costs, housing challenges, and incidents of crime that have touched your lives. I want you to know that your voices are heard. Every day in the House of Commons, I sit in the people's chair on your behalf, bringing your concerns, experiences, and priorities to the heart of our democracy. I have raised these issues in Parliament and will continue to do so with diligence and dedication. I understand the frustration many feel.

As a member of His Majesty's Official Loyal Opposition, I have been holding the government to account. Even when our motions, legislative amendments and recommendations are defeated, we continue to challenge harmful policies and push for solutions on affordability, crime, immigration, and economic stability. Progress can be slow, but my commitment to representing you remains steadfast.

Despite the challenges of this year, I remain hopeful, because I have seen firsthand the strength of this community. I have seen compassion in the way neighbours support one another, perseverance in our small businesses, and determination in our volunteers and service organizations. These qualities remind me that, together, we can overcome obstacles and continue building a brighter future.

In this new year, I promise to continue working with integrity, dedication, and focus on the needs of our riding. I will continue to listen, to advocate, and to speak up for you, because your concerns, experiences, and aspirations guide everything I do in Ottawa.

Thank you once again for your trust, your engagement, and your belief in the work I am doing. May the year ahead bring you peace, good health, and renewed hope.

Wishing you and your families a joyful Holiday Season and an inspiring New Year!



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# BEST OF DECEMBER

The countdown to the holidays continued in December. Just ahead of the formal start of December, the community celebrated the lighting of the Town's Official Christmas Tree at Aurora Town Square, signalling the start of the Town's two-weekend Christmas Market. Over at the nearby Aurora Public Library, their Jingle Jubilee was a daytime prelude to the evening Market. The Aurora Food Pantry celebrated the generosity of Tim Horton's as they received proceeds from the annual Holiday Smile Cookie campaign. Smiles will also be on the faces of Canadian soldiers stationed overseas thanks to Brian and Dianne Harrison, numerous community organizations, and members of the public, who came together to pen more than 12,000 holiday cards for the Armed Forces. Amica Aurora Promenade, the newest addition to Aurora's historic downtown core, celebrated their first Christmas as an open retirement residence, with a Christmas Market, while the start of Chanukkah was marked with the annual Menorah Lighting Ceremony hosted by the Town of Aurora and Chabad Aurora.

Auroran photos by Glenn Rodger



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