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Rocky and Anthony stand next to a bear ice sculpture during the Arctic Adventures event on Saturday, Feb. 14, at Aurora Town Square. The event also ran on Monday, Feb. 16, for Family Day. Attendees enjoyed a variety of activities, displays, and demonstrations. Turn to Page 16 for more photos from the two-day event.

Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger

Local historian links Beatlemania to Aurora during Heritage Week launch at Town Square

BY JIM STEWART
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Thematically-connected displays at Aurora Town Square provided a range of sensory delights for hundreds of visitors who enjoyed the kick-off of Heritage Week activities on Monday afternoon.

Local historian, analog music expert, deejay, and lifelong resident David Heard was a one-man show across two floors at Aurora Town Square on Family Day.

Upstairs, Heard assembled a colourful tribute to the Beatles to reinforce his theme of “Music, Ambience, Love, and Heritage.” The colourful display of red felt hearts and a rich array of Beatles artifacts captured the essence of the Fab Four at the apex of their creative

Continued on page 14



Above: Local historian and deejay David Heard kneels beside his 105-album mural depicting equine images.

Auroran photos by Glenn Rodger

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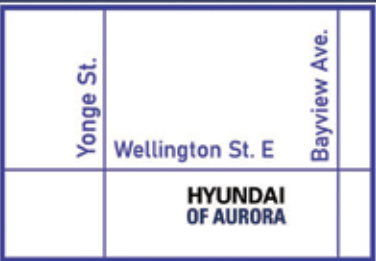
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Awaken Aurora builds on inaugural success with focus on International Women’s Day



The inaugural Awaken Aurora event at Aurora Town Square last month was a resounding success, and the second event is slated for March at Royal Rose Gallery to coincide with International Women’s Day. **Contributed photo**

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

More than 65 women came together at the Aurora Cultural Centre last month for the inaugural Awaken Aurora – The Dawn Within, a new program spearheaded by three local residents to “give women in the community a dedicated space to pause and feel supported and connected” while focusing on their health and wellbeing.

Given the tremendous success of the first session, which included yoga, mindfulness, guest speakers, and a bevy of local vendors, Awaken Aurora founders Lauren Hanna, a health policymaker, digital marketer and mental health advocate Skai Spooner, and realtor Krista Hall, are looking to build on their success just in time for International

Women’s Day.

“I had a feeling that women in Aurora were kind of craving more opportunities to come together as a community, connect with each other, and also spend a little bit more time focusing on their health,” says Hanna. “That said, I think there’s still a degree of pressure that comes with organizing an event, and you put money and time into it, so certainly we were relieved to see that ticket sales were positive and that we sold out.

“We wanted to donate \$500 to the CMHA (Canadian Mental Health Association of York Region and South Simcoe), so selling out also meant that we were able to do that, which was really special and a key measure of success.”

Being able to support the CMHA and their local mental health services was a

key priority for the trio behind Awaken Aurora and with the January success, they aim to raise \$2,000 for the organization through their four signature events, the next of which is set for March 8 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Royal Rose Gallery to align with International Women’s Day, sponsored by realtor Krista Hall.

Tickets began to move quickly.

“It’s really nice that people were watching and keen for details on the next event,” says Hanna. This time around, we’re hosting it at Royal Rose Gallery, so it is a nice chance to support other local businesses and event facilities.”

Newmarket-based author Carly Ottaway, she adds, will be a keynote speaker at the event with a talk focused on “coming back to and celebrating your authentic self.”


Looking back at the success of the first event, Hanna says one participant described the experience as “life-

changing,” a piece of feedback that has put a lot of wind in the sails, propelling them forward.

“It was pretty incredible to receive that email,” says Hanna. “We had a feeling that something a bit magical was happening – the vibe, if I can call it that, when people were coming in was very electric and special, having people connect with each other, just carving out the space to focus on their health and then hearing from two incredible speakers.

“We had a feeling there was something really special transpiring, but the feedback after the event, on the day of, that we received by email, and then in post-event survey was all extremely positive.”

For further information and to keep track of upcoming events, follow them on Instagram @AwakenAurora.ca.



TOWN OF AURORA
PUBLIC NOTICE

NOTICE OF ACCEPTANCE OF PUBLIC WORKS

Subdivision Owner: Glen Ridge Estates Development, (Aurora), Registered Plan 65M - 4614

Date of Acceptance: January 27, 2026

Applicable By-law Number: 6756-26

Description of Public Works Accepted:

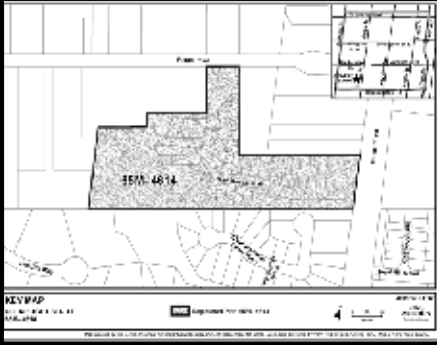
All services referred to in Section 3.01 of the Subdivision Agreement between Glen Ridge Estates Development, (Aurora), and The Corporation of The Town of Aurora for Registered Plan 65M - 4614.

Description of Streets in which Public Works accepted are located as per registered plan 65M - 4614:

Glensteeple Trail

The public works as described above are herewith accepted by the Town of Aurora.

For more information, please contact 905-727-1375.



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Region stands in solidarity with the community of Tumbler Ridge, B.C.

We are deeply saddened by the horrific school shooting in Tumbler Ridge, British Columbia.

Although this tragedy occurred far from York Region, its impact is felt across the country. Violence in a school, a place meant to nurture learning, belonging and safety, is something that affects all of us as parents, leaders and community members.

On behalf of York Regional Council and the Regional Municipality of York, I extend our heartfelt condolences to the families who have lost loved ones, to those recovering from physical and emotional injuries and to the entire Tumbler Ridge community.

We recognize the courage and dedication of the first responders, educators and health care professionals who responded in the immediate aftermath and who continue to support students, families and the broader community during this incredibly difficult time.

At times like this, we are reminded that Canadians stand together in grief and in solidarity. Today, York Region joins communities across the country in mourning this profound loss and in holding the people of Tumbler Ridge in our thoughts.

In honour of the victims of this horrific event, flags at the York Region Administrative Centre located at 17250 Yonge Street in the Town of Newmarket have been lowered to half-mast.

Eric Jolliffe
York Region Chairman and CEO

Step into the cold to bring warmth at Blue Door’s Coldest Night of the Year

Join Blue Door and the City of Richmond Hill as your community comes together for the Coldest Night of the Year – Richmond Hill fundraising walk on Saturday, February 28, 2026. Taking place at Lauremont School - Lower Campus. This meaningful winter evening, community members, local leaders, families, and friends will lace up their boots and walk in solidarity with individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

With temperatures dropping below -20°C this winter, the realities of homelessness become even more dangerous and urgent. Cold nights bring increased risks to health and safety for individuals without stable housing, making access to warm shelter, meals, and support services more critical than ever.

The Coldest Night of the Year is a nationwide event that shines a light on these challenges while raising essential funds to support local programs that provide housing-focused services, emergency shelter, and homelessness prevention.

“This winter, the reality is urgent. More people in our community are facing homelessness, and on the coldest nights, the risks are life-threatening,” says Emmy Kelly, Chief Operations Officer at Blue Door. “The Coldest Night of the Year is not just a walk, it is a call to action. Every step helps open a warm door, provide a safe bed, and move someone closer to stable housing and hope.”

Every step taken and every dollar raised helps Blue Door continue to offer life-changing supports to individuals facing homelessness in York Region. By walking 2 or 5 kms, donating, sponsoring, or volunteering, community members are directly contributing to safer nights, warmer meals, and brighter futures for vulnerable individuals in your community.

Thank you to our Lead sponsor, Fairstone, and supporting sponsor, Inter-World Paper, for their incredible generosity and dedication to the Coldest Night of the Year-Richmond Hill walk. Their contributions will make a real difference in helping individuals experiencing homelessness, hurt, and hunger this winter season.

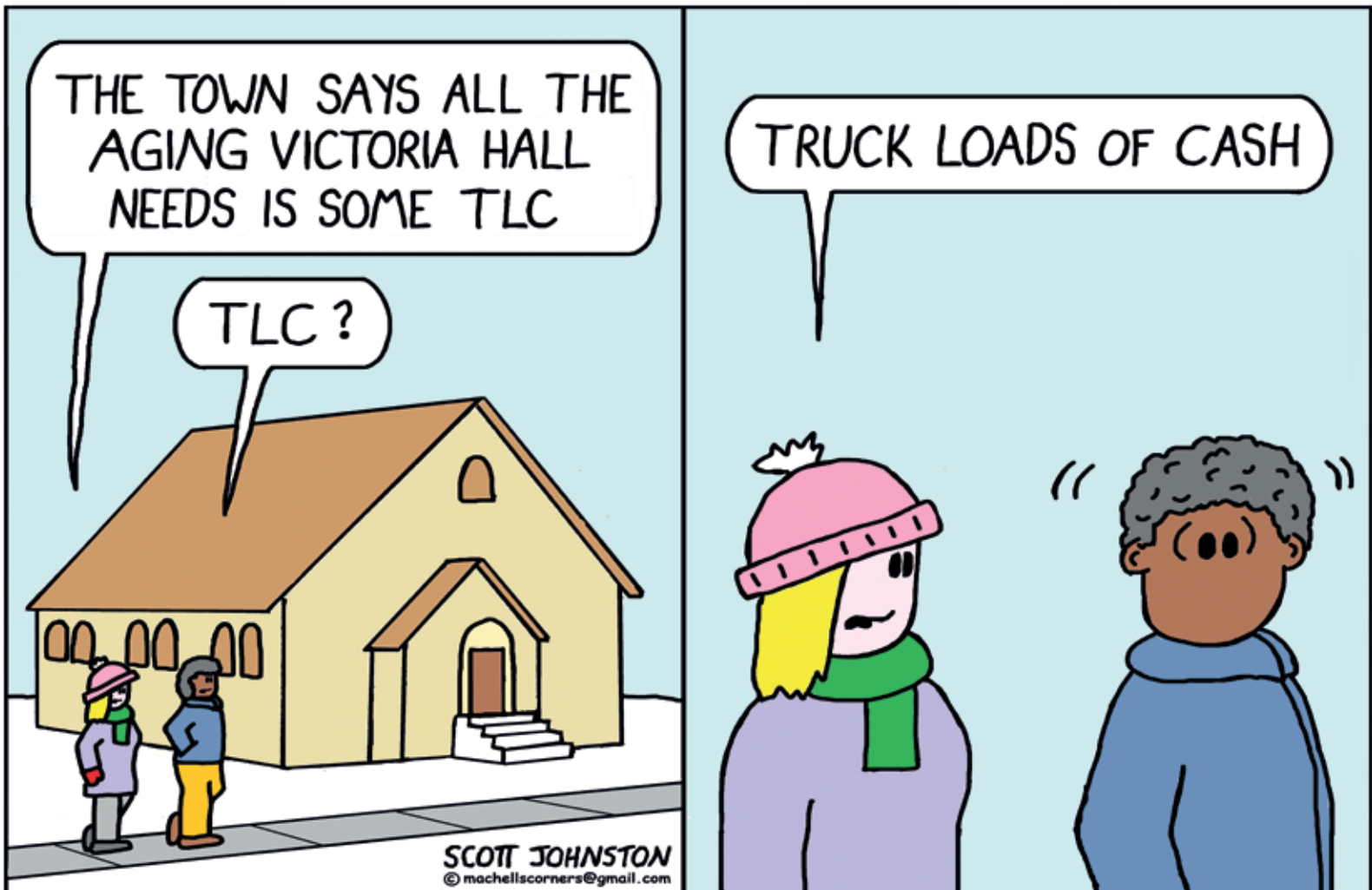
Emmy adds, “Our community always steps forward when it matters most, and we need that compassion now more than ever. I invite anyone who wants to make a real difference to join my team, walk with us, donate, or stand beside those facing homelessness. Together, we can ensure no one is left out in the cold.”

Your community needs you now more than ever. By participating in this meaningful event, you’re not just going for a walk; you’re taking a stand for compassion, dignity, and hope.

By supporting Blue Door, you’re supporting real solutions that help individuals facing homelessness during the harsh winter season. Every step counts.

Blue Door

Machell’s Corners



Flying the friendly skies to an estranged friend

Before I went away to work abroad for a couple of months shortly after I graduated from university, my grandmother had one sage piece of advice.

She wasn’t a big fan of the idea of my going to my destination country as it had been torn apart by civil war about a decade-and-a-half before and was still in the process of healing, but if I was determined to go – and I was – she said I had to keep a travel diary and gave me the money to get one.

It was advice that she followed herself, as her expansive diaries she left behind from trips from such locales as Austria, Switzerland, and Tunisia demonstrated in exacting detail, and she was determined I was going to follow her lead.

I should have. Alas.

As I’ve written in this space previously, I closely immortalized just about every experience I had over the first few days of the trip, but eventually found going above and beyond was taking up no small chunk of time from making new memories, and thought my time would be better spent living the day-to-day.

Great idea? Missed opportunity.

While the broad strokes of the experience are as fresh in my mind today as they’ve ever been, I’ve lost some of the finer details over the years, and that’s a big regret.

Maybe to atone for this lapse in judgement, whenever I’m away on vacation, as I am now, I try my best to make up for it – perhaps not in as formal a volume as a trip diary, but through notes to myself, snapshots of just about everything, and gathering a memento, no matter how tiny or inconsequential, to keep the memories sharp.

I also like to use the time on the plane productively by writing my column based on what I’m experiencing during the flight.

Chatting with your fellow passengers at the gate before you depart can yield a goldmine of things to write about. Everybody is travelling for a different reason and those reasons vary as wildly as the destinations available from Pearson.

Sometimes, particularly in our current climate, you can see people making political statements with their attire – particularly their t-shirts and hats. These t-shirts and hats are, of course, no more and no less comfortable than other non-political options; one can only assume the fun is to observe people’s reactions to whatever inappropriate or hotly-charged slogan you’ve chosen to sport.

I can’t say for certain – I, for one, flew in a t-shirt picked up at and promoting the 2025 Lucille Ball Comedy Festival. Any potential controversy or the odd



BROCK’S BANTER

Brock Weir

eyebrow-raise could only come from people who frown on laughter, and can only hope those people are few and far between.

Sometimes inspiration comes from etiquette – or lack thereof – displayed by fellow passengers in line or on board – like those who think their children screaming at the tops of their lungs in a confined space is the cutest thing ever.

(Spoiler Alert: It’s not. Don’t get me wrong, I don’t begrudge parents travelling with children that cry from time to time, but don’t let’s pretend it’s supposed to be music to our ears or take it as a personal attack when we would rather listen to anything else)

So, ahead of this trip I thought there would be no end to the potential fodder at the airport.

This was set to be my first time flying into the United States since, well, circumstances drastically changed, and going through security, customs, and the whole process would surely provide enough inspiration for three or four columns alone.

Would the customary third degree from customs officials be ramped up to the fourth, fifth, or sixth?

Would officials demand my phone to go through several years’ worth of my social media to try and gauge my personal political leanings before letting me in?

After a few quick questions about destination, purpose of trip, and the amount of cash I was bringing into the country, I was waved through – grateful for a brief process, but kind of annoyed they gave me nothing to write about.

A similar experience happened at the gate. That is to say not much.

Again, the same thing on the plane. There was not a screaming child to be found.

Instead, almost the entirety of my very economical section of the plane was filled by dozens and dozens of seniors headed to Panama. So far, so nothing – except for one verbal brouhaha from one of the cruise-goers towards a mother and son sitting next

to her which illustrated no generation has a monopoly on empathy.

For a writer, it wasn’t the most fruitful of missions but I was glad that even though the final destination was California, a state that is generally pretty stable at the present time, nothing of the travel experience had changed too dramatically since the last time we were out here.

Despite any selfish disappointment I may have felt as a writer, I was surely relieved as a visitor.

As we settled in with the friends hosting us for the first few days of the trip, the point was underscored.

The friends in question are amongst my oldest and dearest, with one of the most enduring friendships being with one who settled in the United States nearly 20 years ago after meeting an American and starting a family.

Over the years, she has apparently become a go-to person for the media in her native country to get the inside scoop on what living in the United States is “really” like, particularly from the expatriate perspective.

Wildfires raging out of control? They give her a call for perspective.

Something goes down between her home country and her adoptive country? A phone call or a video link usually aren’t too far away.

Thoughts on the overall political situation in the country? Dial ‘er up!

Some of the questions she’s fielded, particularly as mercury in the United States’ political thermometer is practically shooting through the tube, have become increasingly negative, dour, and not necessarily reflective of her day-to-day reality.

People aren’t tapped into the news cycle or their favourite social media pundits 24 hours a day, seven days a week? They’re shocked. Kids are still walking to school as normal? Wow. You don’t think of one specific man and his antic du jour at every waking moment of your life? Colour them stunned.

One question – a statement, really – really stuck out: “We didn’t think you could still go and enjoy a picnic and listen to music in the park.” Huh?

I’m not sure what vision they had in mind, but it apparently it was wide off the mark.

So were mine.

And I’m glad I experienced it for myself.

I can’t say I’ll ever resume being a regular visitor to the United States again until relations between our countries are repaired or significant changes unfold that allow another healing process to truly begin, but I’m glad to have had an authentic experience – even if it might be an experience limited to this more small-L liberal state – and see it for myself.

THE AURORAN
Aurora’s Community Newspaper

The Auroran Newspaper Company Ltd.
15213 Yonge Street, Suite 8, Aurora, L4G 1L8

Main number 905-727-3300
Fax number 905-727-2620

Founder Ron Wallace | Publisher Emeritus Rosemary Schumaker

Subscriptions available within Canada and U.S.
email: administration@auroran.com

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We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada

Funded by the Government of Canada | **Canada**

To submit a letter to the editor, please send your email to brock@lpcmedia.ca. Deadline for submissions is Sunday at 1 p.m.

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...Staring at the screen!

We are certainly not the first in history to be enthralled by controlled illumination. From the days of flickering fire on cave walls to the multi-million pixel glow that we find all around us, humans have found escape and enlightenment in these lights. From about 1850-1900, “magic lantern slides” were the popular at-home form of this entertainment, providing 3- or 4-image sequences, often hand-coloured, which told a short moral tale or an imaginative travelogue. These examples (85.36) were used with our Magic Lantern, on display here at Aurora Town Square. Join us tomorrow for a special big-screen presentation of A Night at the Museum, with museum-themed interactive activities and laughs that hold up better than a sail-cycle!

Visit boxoffice.auroratownsquare.ca
for more information.



Time Travellers Diary

By **Jeremy Hood**
Museum Collections Technician
Aurora Museum & Archives

Don’t you dairy (a case in point)

I’ll cut to the chase: Through misadventure, I found myself back in 1876 Aurora, on the side of the road, in line for a horse-drawn dairy cart. The dairyman was getting louder as he dropped coins rhythmically into a wooden box. “I heard Hartman say, truly, that he considered Mrs. Watson’s dairy to be worthless, and that he wouldn’t pay a cent for it!”

The customer ahead of me took his bottles and started to back away. The dairyman continued, “and then, THEN, I hear that he’d spoken with her before AND after our conversation, and in fact made her an offer against mine! Simple.. Dishonesty! Erm, have a grand afternoon!” His customer was gone; I was the only one left. He smiled broadly at me, resetting his demeanour. “Thank you for stopping at Scott’s Dairy! It being Thursday, we’ve got buttermilk, but if you wait until tomorrow, the skim will be plentiful!”

I wanted the story more than the milk, but I did feel sorry for the chap, so I chose a pint of buttermilk and a half pound of butter for a belated Shrove back in 2026. “That’ll be seven cents, my good sir.”

As I shuffled for my change, he set off again about his feud with Hartman. “You must have read the newspaper, he admitted to what he’d said! You must have seen that I called him a deceiver, with a capital D. Tell me, what does ‘not a cent’ mean to...” and here he paused a moment. The glint of a new Loonie among the coins in my hand had caught his eye.

I quickly located a tiny age-appropriate silver dime. Handing it over, I interjected, “Oh no! He should not have said that if he meant to make an offer for her dairy. At least you came out of the deal on top, you know what they say: the cream riseth!”

After examining the dime closely, he handed me three enormous pennies and eyed me quizzically. “You’re not from around here, are you? After Mrs. Watson accepted my more-than-fair offer, Hartman went ahead and opened up anyway, and now we are in fierce competition. He is even running advertisements in the paper,” his anger curled into deviousness. “But I think I have him: his ads are headed with just: ‘MILK!’ where mine, ingeniously, are headed: ‘MILK! MILK!’ - surely such doubling will get the deliveries going. Any day now.”

He reached into his cart and produced a new copy of the newspaper, which he opened roughly to a page full of advertisements. I saw that he saw MILK! and MILK! MILK! stacked together. He let out a gasp, “Side by each?! Above and below?” He promptly turned, hopping into the seat of his wagon. “I will have immediate words with the paper’s editor about this, thank you, we are closing!” In a cloud of dust, I was alone, and he was on his way down Yonge Street. Three follow-ups: I checked, and in 1877, those pages of advertisements that had featured the duelling dairies no longer had any “MILK!” ads at all. The Watsons above were a completely different family from those who owned a dairy at Spruce and Centre Streets. And I’m now lactose intolerant.



DIALOGUE WITH DAWN

By **Dawn Gallagher Murphy**
MPP, Newmarket-Aurora

Celebrating non-profit sector and Chinese New Year

I hope everyone enjoyed a restful long weekend and had the opportunity to spend quality time with their loved ones on Family Day. As you know, February is a meaningful month for many in our community, and I would like to extend my warmest wishes to our Chinese community as we welcome the Year of the Fire Horse. May this new year bring strength, energy, courage, and new opportunities to all who celebrate.

This week marks Non-Profit Sector Appreciation Week, recognized provincially from Feb. 16 to 20. This week acknowledges the remarkable contributions of organizations that uplift individuals and families across Ontario.

In honour of this occasion, I was pleased to host my third annual Non-Profit Appreciation Event, where we welcomed and recognized more than 40 local organizations that strengthen Newmarket-Aurora every day.

From supporting newcomers, youth, and seniors to providing essential services and offering cultural, recreational, and social programs, these organizations are the heart of our community.

Their work often happens quietly, but its impact is felt deeply, and it was a privilege to thank them personally for their commitment, compassion, and service.

I encourage you to reach out to a local non-profit that you support this week and express your appreciation for all they do... trust me, they will

be thrilled, and you will, in turn, be uplifted!

At the provincial level, improving long-term care remains one of our government’s top priorities. Thanks to ongoing efforts and historic investments, we are making meaningful progress in strengthening care for seniors across Ontario.

As of December 2025, the province has approved over 150 long-term care construction projects, representing more than 24,500 new and redeveloped beds in various stages of approval or construction. These projects are helping ensure that seniors — both today and in the years ahead — can access quality care closer to home.

But building more long-term care homes, as these are homes for our residents, also means ensuring

they have the staff needed to provide excellent care. That is why our government announced a \$1.92-billion investment beginning this year to increase and maintain staffing levels in long-term care.

This investment supports the hiring and retention of personal support workers, nurses, and other health-care professionals — reinforcing our commitment to delivering the highest standard of care.

These staffing investments build on the nearly \$5 billion previously committed to expand the long-term care workforce. Thanks to this work, Ontario now leads the country in the highest average daily direct care provided to long-term care residents.

Today, residents receive over one additional hour of daily direct care compared to four years ago — an increase of 36 per cent per resident, representing 15 full extra days of care per year.

Here in York Region, local homes are benefiting directly from these investments, with new funding of nearly \$100 million supporting staffing positions and enhanced care services to meet the needs of our growing senior population. This is truly significant for long-term care health professionals here in our region, as well as the residents they serve.

As always, my office is here to support you. I look forward to continuing our work together as we continue to build a strong, caring, and connected Newmarket-Aurora.



GETTING THINGS DONE

Mayor
Tom Mrakas

In my opinion, renovating Victoria Hall is the responsible decision if we are serious about preserving an important piece of Aurora’s built Heritage.

There are only three options with a historic building like this: renovate it, sell it, or demolish it. If we truly believe in heritage preservation — in restoring a proud, storied building so it can once again serve our community — then renovation is the right choice.

Back in 2016, an independent study estimated the cost at over \$600,000 — before nearly a decade of rising construction and material prices. Costs won’t go down by waiting. Doing nothing isn’t neutral; it’s demolition by decay. I won’t let that happen to one of Aurora’s heritage assets.

Yes, the price tag raises questions. I understand that. But once detailed structural, electrical, and mechanical reviews were completed, it became clear that significant work is required

to meet modern safety, accessibility, and building code standards. These are not cosmetic upgrades — they are foundational repairs that protect this building for the long term.

Victoria Hall is an asset. Once brought into a proper state of repair, it can attract market-value lease opportunities, generating long-term value for residents while preserving an irreplaceable piece of our history. Council has made no decisions on

future use — but regardless of use, this work must be done to stabilize and protect the building.

By renovating it now, we preserve our heritage, strengthen our downtown, and ensure this building can serve our community for another 100 years.

This project is funded through our Facility Asset Management and Growth & New reserves — exactly what those reserves are for: investing in infrastructure and protecting our capital assets.

It does not impact the tax rate.

This report was received by the Committee of the Whole. My hope — and my expectation — is that when it comes before Council for decision, we move forward.

Because this is bigger than one building. It’s about whether we preserve what matters, invest in our future, and show responsible leadership.

That’s Leadership That Gets Things Done.

Food insecurity has only gotten worse, but revised Charter hopes to make difference

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Morgan Sage first joined the York Region Food Council when food insecurity was a major concern for one in 13 area households.

Six years on, this number, she says, now stands at one in five.

It is a “dire situation” by any measure and one that the York Region Food Council hopes to address through its revised and refreshed York Region Food Charter.

The updated York Region Food Charter was formally presented to Aurora Council last month.

Aurora was the first municipality to endorse the current iteration of the Food Charter in April of 2024.

“The York Region Food Council is an initiative of the York Region Food Network, which is a food security non-profit that connects and empowers people to access healthy food through education and advocacy,” said Sage. “The Food Council itself is a multidisciplinary collaboration of food system actors that work together to create and support initiatives that foster food security and community development. We work towards our vision through collective advocacy initiatives, including updating the York Region Food Charter.”

Sage described the Food Charter as a statement of values and directions to guide food and agricultural policy and action. It’s meant to encourage collaboration and coordination between the sector, governments, and other stakeholders.”

York Region’s first Food Charter was published in 2013 by the York Region Food Network, and the Food Council was born out of that first document.

Ten years later, the Council began the process of reviewing the Charter.

It was a review Sage said involved nearly 300 community and sector voices in the consultation process.

“The Food Charter that is newly published is made up of six different pillars, including equity, social justice, and food security, health and well-being, the local agri-food sector, environmental stewardship, knowledge and sharing, culture and community,” Sage told Council. “Each pillar...is associated with a value statement as well.

“One of the things that we heard during our consultations was, ‘We don’t want just a document that’s going to sit and gather dust, we want action.’ That’s why we created this action document, which is a toolkit with optional actions associated with each pillar. Each pillar has several actions associated with it. This document is not only a tool for us as a Food Council, but also for governments and organizations who also endorse the Food Charter. It can help you identify how your work already does contribute to advancing the food charter or how actions that you might take on to, again, help advance that food charter.”

A key way Aurora has helped advance the goals of the Food Charter in recent years is the development of the John Abel Community Garden in Aurora’s northeast. Part of the York Region Food Network’s community garden network,



they held their second garden tour last year, and John Abel Park was a key destination.

“It was absolutely wonderful to have the exchange of information between those who work at Aurora as well as other gardens as well just to exchange information and best practices,” she said, noting the Food Council will continue to work with the Town on initiatives going forward.

But, she stressed, time is a factor for action and impact.

“I feel like we’ve been positioned within the non-profit sector to start advocating a little bit more about food insecurity in our communities, because the cost-of-living crisis is atrocious and harming a lot of people. What we’re trying to do is bring organizations together to have a collective

voice in the non-profit sector around food insecurity in York Region.... When I started in my position, the stats for food insecurity in York Region was about one in 13 households and now we’re sitting around one in five,” she said.

“That’s pretty clear when you look at our programs and look at the conversations that are happening around the Region as well – just the number of people who are in dire situations is just... there are so many people. Housing is expensive, food insecurity is sort of like a result of everything else being expensive – especially housing.

“I would say the circumstances are much more dire than they were six years ago and there is also a lot more desperation. I was looking at rates of homelessness the other day, and it was also astounding where rates of homelessness have more than doubled in the last three years in York Region. It’s clear when you see people come into that, there’s a level of desperation and struggle that is just hard to see.”

Heritage grant will help rehabilitate historic “Bunker House”

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

An unassuming-looking local home from 1875, which could have played a pivotal role in Ontario history in a worst-case-scenario, could soon see some additional preservation efforts if a Heritage Grant is approved by Council this month.

The Bunker House, which was purchased by Metropolitan Toronto in 1962 and retrofitted with a concrete bunker to serve as an alternative seat of municipal operations, if necessary, during the Cold War, could be on the receiving end of a \$10,000 grant.

Located at 220 Old Yonge Street, The Cold War Bunker is seeing “significant weather damage” as the result of failed sealing and waterproofing and a roof leak. The homeowners’ application for a Heritage Grant was supported in December by the Town’s Heritage Advisory Committee.

Aurora’s Heritage Grant program was established in April of 2025 to help owners of heritage properties maintain them for years to come.

There is an annual cap of \$30,000 for the fund, and money can be used to maintain heritage features, remove

graffiti, repair original windows, doors, and other elements, reconstruct lost architectural features, and façade restoration.

Applicants are required to provide two contractor quotes.

“220 Old Yonge Street is individually designated under Bylaw 5905-16 and was originally built circa 1875,” says Heritage Planner Adam Robb in his recommendation to Council. “Purchased by Metro Toronto in 1962, a concrete bunker was then added to the main building, which also features an emergency escape port. The bunker contains several relics from the Cold War, including an illuminated map of Metro Toronto evacuation routes and telecommunications lines.

“Historically, the house is associated with the Parteger and Cosford families, who farmed the property and the surrounding lands. After the purchase by Metro Toronto, the property became a significant readiness centre in case of a nuclear attack on Toronto. The property continued to serve as a training centre until the early 1990s. The designation bylaw specifically lists the underground bunker and associated relics, such as the illuminated map and emergency water tanks as heritage attributes.”



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BUSINESS & FINANCE



Bereavement program in York Region celebrates Provincial boost

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

A bereavement program serving residents of York Region had

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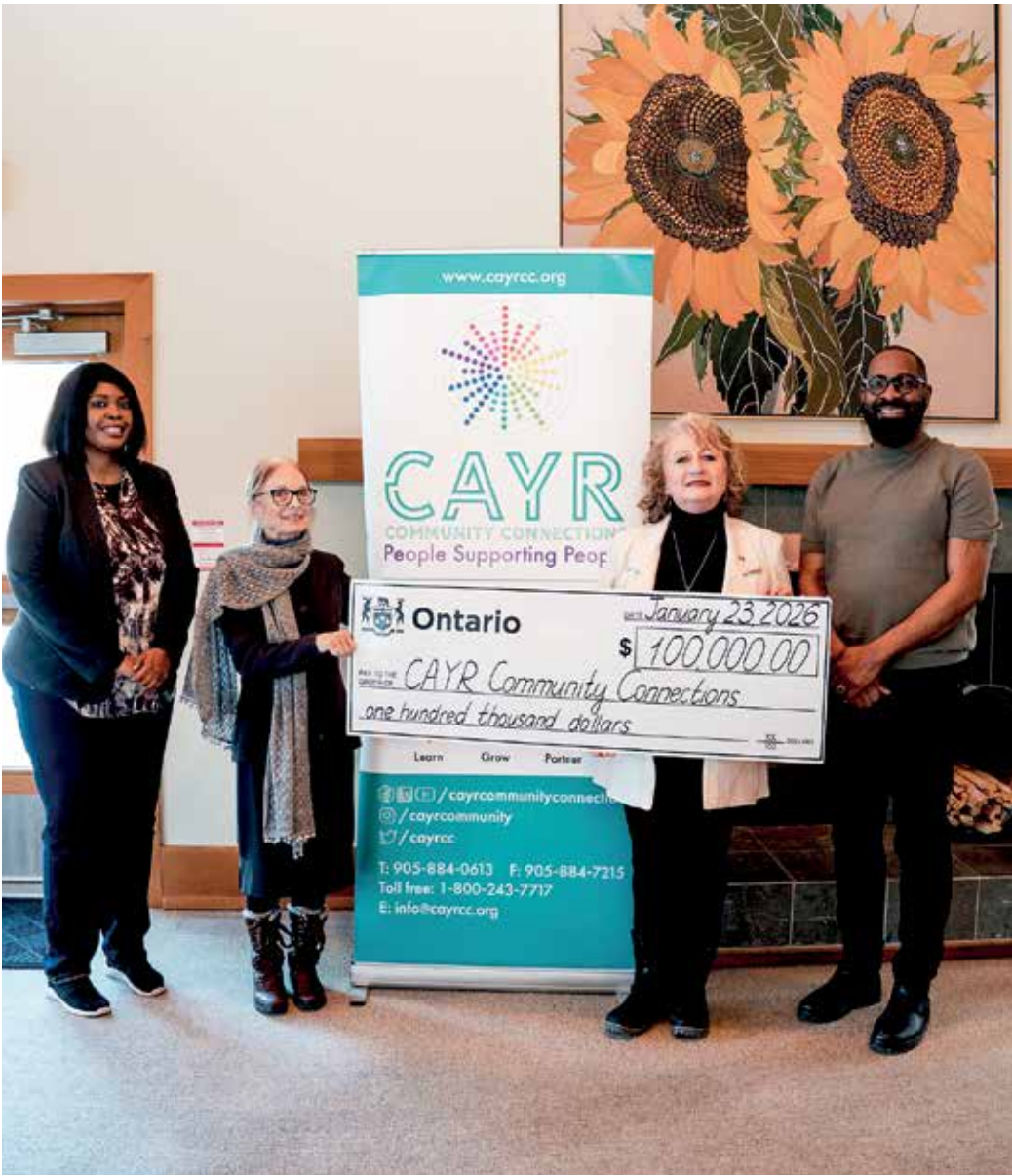
something to celebrate recently when they looked upon the success of a Provincial grant of \$100,000.

CAYR Community Connections received the Ontario Trillium Grant in 2024 to pilot a new bereavement program to support individuals who had lost loved ones to substance abuse and overdose.

CAYR began laying the groundwork for the ongoing pilot last spring and recently welcomed Newmarket-Aurora MPP Dawn Gallagher Murphy to see the work that has been carried out so far.

“Our government is proud to support CAYR Community Connections with this \$100,000 seed grant through the Ontario Trillium Foundation, which has helped pilot a compassionate and much-needed bereavement program in York Region,” said MPP Gallagher Murphy. “By bringing together service providers, community partners, and individuals with lived experience, this project is helping people navigate profound grief without stigma or isolation.

“I’m grateful for the dedicated work of the entire CAYR team in creating space for healing, connection, and hope in our community.”



A cheque for \$100,000 was presented to CAYR Community Connections from the Ontario Trillium Grant, enabling the organization to pilot a bereavement program for people who lost loved ones to substance abuse and overdose. **Photo courtesy of the Office of MPP Dawn Gallagher Murphy**

In turn, CAYR said they are “thrilled” to carry out this meaningful programming in York Region for people who Marie Morton, Executive Director at CAYR, said are experiencing a loss that is often stigmatized.

“Thanks to the \$100,000 OTF grant, CAYR Community Connections, in consultation with service providers, community members and related stakeholders, started working together in April 2025 to better understand the needs of people who have lost loved ones to substance poisoning and overdose in York Region and to provide them with grief and bereavement support,” said the organization in a statement. “This pilot project

will lay the groundwork for new collaborations and programming to meet these unique needs in the Region.

“CAYR’s mission is to create welcoming, confidential, and inclusive environments for dignified support and education, empowering a diverse population including, people living with and those affected by HIV/AIDS, individuals affected by or at risk of HIV/Hepatitis C, people who use substances, members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, and allies and partners supporting underserved communities.”

For more information on CAYR Community Connections and the services they provide the community, visit www.cayrcc.org.

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**PICKLEPLEX
GRAND OPENING**

A grand opening was held at Pickleplex Aurora on Feb. 13, with owner Asif and Aurora Mayor Tom Mrakas present for the ribbon cutting. Pickleplex is located at 340 Addison Hall Circle, Unit 1, Aurora and offers a social club for pickleball players.

Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger

Oh’s Unspoken Words spark conversation at Royal Rose Gallery in Aurora

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Toronto-based artist Chika Oh might prefer to let her paintbrush do the talking, but her evocative portraits of Black female entrepreneurs are sparking a community conversation at Aurora’s Royal Rose Gallery.

The new exhibition, a solo show by the Nigerian-born artist, opened February 5 at the gallery, located on the west side of Yonge Street, south of Wellington, just in time for Black History Month.

“I am so honoured that you’re here during Black History Month, but far beyond that, I look forward to working with you 365 days of the year,” said Royal Rose Gallery owner Rosa Calabrese. “We have a lot of exciting projects on the go, so you will be seeing Chika all over the place. I’m just so happy and proud to be working with you and I’m so glad I met you.”

Also attending the opening night of Unspoken Words were Mayor Tom Mrakas and Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese. Addressing the audience, Mayor Mrakas said the works by Oh, and the fact that they found a space at the Royal Rose, speak to Aurora being an “arts and culture-centric community.”

“I’m very proud that you decided to display your artwork here in our Town,” he said. “I just think it’s very powerful, and I think it allows people in our community to come and learn and talk about those lived experiences that people have, and also remind them about the stories that traditionally have been silenced. I think that’s what’s so powerful about having such an exhibit here.”

Prior to the show’s opening, Oh

told The Auroran she envisioned the work as an exploration of “memory, silence, and embodied truth.”

“It was extremely intentional that I chose entrepreneurs and females,” she said. “There are so many different layers of being a woman. Oftentimes women are mothers, entrepreneurs, pillars of the family, so all of those complexities and the depth of each of those positions they hold, that’s what I was trying to translate onto the canvas.”

She described it as a “legacy-building” show designed to break down barriers, move forward, and “bring what I have to offer the community.”

These were themes she touched upon, addressing the art lovers gathered on the gallery floor.

“In every successful, balanced, and healthy society, there must be an artist and creative present at every table and decision,” she said. “Artists help us see beyond numbers and urgency, but more into people, memory and meaning. When creativity is included, decisions become more humane, sustainable, and connected to the communities they affect.

“This is especially important during Black History Month. Unspoken Words is not about retelling history, the history we already know; it’s about creating spaces for reflection, presence, and stories that are often lived beneath the surface.

“I welcome your reflections, conversations and thoughts tonight and beyond. Thank you for showing up and supporting us living artists and for helping us keep this culture alive. I want everybody to leave here tonight inspired and to keep art alive in your homes, in your workplaces, in your businesses, conversations,



Chika Oh, top right, is pictured with Royal Rose Gallery owner Rosa Calabrese. Above, Chika Oh and Rosa Calabrese were joined by Mayor Tom Mrakas and spoken word artist Rita Cahill.

Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger

community, schools, and life in general.”
Unspoken words runs at the Royal Rose Gallery through to the end of February. It is located at 15210 Yonge Street. For further information, visit royalroseart.ca.

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APL’s Roots & Resonance event encourages Black leadership, finding voice



Left: Certified health coach Aisha Saintiche led the recent workshop at the Aurora Public Library. Centre: Aurora Black Community Association founder and president Phiona Durrant was among the participants in the Roots & Resonance event. Right: Roots & Resonance concluded with music from Dylan Smith. **Auroran photos by Brock Weir**

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Do you feel comfortable raising your voice when you want to make a difference?

People have different reasons for sitting on their hands, but every voice has the power to effect significant change.

That was the message driven home this month by certified health coach Aisha Saintiche at Roots & Resonance, a Black History Month panel hosted by the Aurora Public Library.

The event invited participants to

reflect on their own and collective histories, explore their leadership identities, and “embrace the courage it takes to show up boldly, visibly, and unapologetically in every space they enter.”

Joining Saintiche at the event were speaker Phiona Durrant, Founder and President of the Aurora Black Community Association, and visual and performing artist Dylan Smith, who brought a full repertoire of music to the Library’s Living Room Space.

When Saintiche was on the cusp of turning 40, she wanted to do so in style –

“like Beyonce, with my hair in the wind” – dialling up her personal training regimen. She went back to school, she received her Master’s, “all the things that I thought I needed to do to gain this concept of notoriety, to gain this power, to be worthy of what I thought power looked like, or what I thought elevation looked like.”

“There was something so much deeper that was happening to me at the time that I couldn’t quite put my finger on,” she shared. “Then it kind of hit me what the real impact and what the real shift was. The real shift was...I was doing all these things aesthetically, working out, drinking water, but what was changing was the recognition of my ability to change my course without other people being able to dictate what that looked like.

“I had experienced microaggressions. I had experienced the, ‘It’s not your time yet. Just keep working hard. Take on this project. Go back to school.’ Those of us who have been in this space know what that looks like. It was at that moment that I realized I can’t believe how much time I spent waiting or other people to tell me I was worthy. I always was. I just needed to figure that out for myself.”

While her physical transformation unfolded, she was “letting go of those narratives, those expectations, those assumptions about how I needed to show up, how I needed to make other people comfortable.”

“What really came to me was that it was truly in the significance of my voice and the intention that I set for myself, which is where my power existed,” she said. “For me, the power of my voice revealed itself in intentionality with which I began to live my life, in the choices that I made for myself, in the boundaries I set for myself, in the truth that I stopped negotiating in the name of other people’s comfort.”

She realized she didn’t need anyone to give her permission to be a leader; instead, she had to harness that voice to access the power she already had, she said.

“Igniting your power and using your voices means understanding that you

truly have agency,” she continued. “The reality is it is time for us to start telling a completely different story. There’s a quote that says, it only takes one voice at the right pitch to start an avalanche. While the collective power of many voices is undeniable, while unity and shared commitment matter deeply, never underestimate the impact of your voice. But the reality is you’re not just here in this life to observe. And you are certainly not here to just participate superficially. You are here because you are an essential thread in a beautiful tapestry, one that, when woven together, reflects the shared and individual experiences of our history. When your voice joins that tapestry with intention, with truth, and with courage. It doesn’t just speak, it truly does shape history.

“The reality is that we are not waiting for the world to take notice that we are seeking power. We’re simply waiting for the world to understand that we’ve arrived.... You do not need to become someone else to lead. Be yourself. You do not need to wait until you feel this concept of ‘ready,’ because the reality is we’re never ready, right? There’s always some reason why we are not ready. You do not need permission to stand fully in who you are. The leadership you are seeking already lives within you. And the moment you decide to invoke it is where the voice is.”

Over the course of the event, Durrant said she grew up feeling her voice didn’t have power and often walked into spaces wondering if she “belonged.”

“I create opportunities to make myself feel at home,” she said. “We don’t need permission to use our voice. My ancestor couldn’t be on the bus, they had to be sent to a different toilet – I have a legacy of what they’ve done. How could I walk around timid? I can’t walk around timid when they’ve already done the work to make sure I can be in spaces like this where my skin colour is not an issue to put me out, so let’s celebrate that.

“Black History is... not a moment to be mopey, it’s a celebration. Celebration is liberation and you honour that. We thank the people that have done the work for us.”

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WEEK OF FEBRUARY 19, 2026

Junior Tigers prowl to six-point week with wins over Cobourg, Niagara Falls, Markham

BY JIM STEWART

Aurora Coach and General Manager James Thomson was satisfied with his hockey club’s performance this week after the Junior Tigers clawed their way to three wins and one loss in a six-day stretch.

“To have a six-point week and to see them believe in one another and see them buy in was the most satisfying part,” said Thomson. “For these guys to feel good and have some fun together was great to see, too.”

The Tigers opened the week with an impressive 3-0 win over the Cougars in Cobourg on Monday night, but dropped a 4-0 decision in Pickering versus the Panthers on Friday night. However, Aurora’s Junior A hockey club bounced back to beat Niagara Falls 6-3 at the ACC on Saturday, and edged the Royals 4-3 in Markham on Sunday afternoon.

It was the Tigers’ most successful week of the season, and Coach Thomson applauded his team’s play, especially in Cobourg on Monday night.

“For us, it was probably our best sixty minutes of structured hockey this season,” he said. “We controlled the play, and we were perfect on the penalty kill — something we’ve worked on as a team. Everybody had a role in the win. I wish we could have capitalized on our chances a bit more, but the Cougars played hard against us. Kraus pitching his first OJHL shutout was a highlight for us.”

Thomson’s goaltender, Noah Kraus, turned aside all 24 shots he faced to backstop the visitors to a big road win.

After a scoreless first period, Anrijs Bundzenieks fired his 18th of the season to give the Tigers a 1-0 lead exactly six minutes into the middle frame.

Aurora defender Martin Maryanovsky gave his club a two-goal lead midway through the final period and notched an empty netter with eight seconds left on the scoreboard to provide the margin of victory.

On Saturday night at the ACC, Coach Thomson was pleased with the Tigers’ performance against an OJHL West opponent: “When we play a team from the other division, there’s less predictability because we only see a team like Niagara Falls once a year.”

He continued, “We had a little blip in the second period when we gave up a 3-1 lead by allowing two goals early. We haven’t played with a lot of leads this year, but our guys responded well by the end of the period to re-take the lead. Jonathan Scott was great on the PK for us, and we shut down six power plays. Everyone contributed to the win. By focusing on taking better care of the D-Zone, we created chances on offence.”

Thomson’s offence produced six goals versus the Canadians after being blanked the night before in Pickering.

After Niagara Falls opened the scoring thirty seconds into the game when Brandon Gauthier beat Kian Hodgins, the Tigers roared back with goals by Lucas Marshall, Javian Nei, and Marcus Carter to head into the first intermission with a 3-1 lead.

After giving up two goals early in the second period to Jesse Gauthier and Jacob Brunton, Hodgins roared back, too.

Aurora’s goaltender kept the visitors off the scoresheet for the remaining 32 minutes of play en route to a 46-save win that earned him Second Star of the Game honours.

With Hodgins barring the door, Paul Mazanik and Maryanovsky scored four minutes apart in the latter half of the middle frame to stake Aurora to a two-goal advantage.

The Tigers took their 5-3 lead into the final frame, and Charlie Hotles closed the scoring at 16:11 to put Aurora up by three. Cayden Smith — after his OHL experience last week with the Erie Otters — pulled on his Tigers jersey and earned his 30th assist of the season on Hotles’ marker.

In our post-game chat on Sunday evening, Coach Thomson noted the similarities in his club’s winning performances versus Cobourg, Niagara Falls, and Markham, but emphasized that the win against the Royals “meant more to us.”

“We enjoyed being spoilers and get some payback against Markham after giving one away to them the week before,” he said. “All our guys were motivated. Kraus played great again, and getting a goal from Avery Grant was a good sign for the club. He’s been such a big part of our team culture, and his goal tied it 1-1 late in the first period to give us momentum going into the second.”

Smith catalyzed that momentum when he scored 38 seconds into the middle frame to give Aurora its first lead of the game. The Tigers held their 2-1 lead until 15:25 of the second when Matteas Stark tied it.

Coach Thomson applauded the play of Cole Crawford, who tallied two before the second intermission to give the visitors a two-goal lead.

“Our offence was working, and one of our youngest players — 16-year-old Cole Crawford — scored two goals. They were big goals for us. Javian Nei made a great pass to Cole to put us up 4-2. We got a little sloppy in the third period, but Kraus made some big saves.”

Kraus’s 31-save performance provided bookend wins — in Cobourg and Markham — to frame a six-point



Demi Lazarou (5) wins a key third-period draw while teammate Lily Paisley (16) moves into attack mode. Lazarou scored Central York’s only goal – her 14th of the season – in a 2-1 loss to Whitby. **Auroran photo by Jim Stewart**

week for the Tigers. Hotles and Smith spurred the offence with two points each to help edge the Royals.

The surging Tigers host the North York Rangers on Friday, February 20, at the ACC. Puck drop is 7 p.m.



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Banjo Man Blues Workshop takes unique look at local history

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

It’s impossible to say what brought man and banjo together at an early Aurora photography studio back in 1876, but it’s a question that’s been on the minds of local historians for many years – and one that could see an answer this month at the



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Banjo Man Blues Workshop.
The Banjo Man Blues Workshop is set to unfold at the Aurora Cultural Centre, on Saturday, February 28, at 3 p.m., as part of the Aurora Winter Blues Festival.
The session with Michelle Johnston of the Aurora Museum and Archives and award-winning Underground Railroad historian and musician Diana Braithwaite, focuses on the history of Black settlement in York Region, with this mysterious photo at the heart of it all.
“The photo really stood out – it’s a carte de visite, a small printed photograph on a cardboard backing that were really popular in the late 1800s. They were designed to take the place of calling cards,” explains Johnson. “This photo is of a Black gentleman in a Yonge Street photo studio holding his banjo. He’s not just holding his banjo and posing for an image; he’s engaging with it, prompting the viewer to think about the relationship between himself and the instrument, instead of a formal posed studio portrait, which stands out for a photograph at the time.
“Photography wasn’t accessible. These were moments where you would really capture your likeness and be able to share that with people through the mail system. This is different. It’s different in terms of a visible minority in Aurora at a time we don’t know much about, and it’s different in terms of the type of photography and the type of pose.”
The 150-year-old photograph is earliest photographic evidence in the Museum’s

collection that depict persons of African descent in the Aurora community.
“It stood out quite vibrantly in the collection. We don’t know a lot about the image; we know where it was taken, we can infer from the pose that the person’s a musician and the instrument is important to them, and we hit a roadblock because we didn’t quite know more than that,” says Johnson.
The photo took on new resonance when the Museum began collaborating with the Aurora Cultural Centre and its live music producer, Derek Andrews, in bringing a heritage component to the Aurora Winter Blues Festival’s workshop programs.
Andrews, in turn, connected Johnson with Braithwaite, and the idea for the workshop bloomed from there.
“Our goal was, can we figure out who this person was? But really, the journey of bringing the photo from the archive and bringing in the right people and the right expertise to kind of help talk about the photo and really set the stage from what this person experienced in Aurora in 1876,” says Johnson. “What was Aurora like? Where did they come from? Where were they going? Just trying to get the broader picture and all the right people have kind of come together.”
For more on their findings, take in the workshop on February 28.
Bring your curiosity, says Johnson, and be “prepared to come on a journey with us, and we’ll let our curiosity lead the way in fulfilling the story.”
“This photograph shows a Black gentleman with his banjo and that connection of the banjo to Black culture and memory is huge. That instrument has such a large role to play in that story across oceans and across continents, and the fact that we have this photo in our collection that was taken on Yonge Street, that is symbolic of that relationship between this instrument and the culture is incredible,” she says. “For anybody interested in music, music history, culture, community, lived memory, shared experience, that’s really what we’re digging into here, and we’ll



Underground Railroad historian and award-winning musician Diana Braithwaite will join Michelle Johnston of the Aurora Museum and Archives for the Banjo Man workshop.
Photo courtesy of the Town of Aurora

be looking at the banjo specifically, the Black settlements in the area, a little bit of photography talk to kind of break down how this has all come together. This photo perfectly captures that relationship and the importance of that instrument to the culture. And I really do think that people will leave with a better understanding of that.
“It’s incredible [to host this in Black History Month]. It couldn’t have been a better confluence of people. When we were looking at this photograph years ago, we thought about the different expertise and knowledge bases we would need to really flesh this out. With a banjo, it’s live performing arts, it’s music history; the photography studio is its historic settings and our archival knowledge. To be able to bring it all together at the end of Black History Month is a phenomenal opportunity and it’s also fantastic to be able to have the importance of that instrument rise to the top of the story.”
For more information on the 2026 Aurora Winter Blues Festival, including concert and workshop tickets, visit aurora.ca/awbf2026.



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2026

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HAPPY NEW YEAR

As we celebrate the New Year and welcome the Year of the Horse, I extend my warmest wishes to everyone marking this special occasion. The Horse symbolizes strength, courage, hard work, and forward momentum that carry us toward new opportunities and successes in the year ahead. I wish all who celebrate a joyful, healthy, and prosperous New Year.

**MICHAEL PARSA, MPP**
Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill



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Local historian links Beatlemania to Aurora during Heritage Week launch at Town Square



Left, Aurora Historical Society reps Kathleen Vahey and Sonja Rebus provided warm welcomes to visitors.



Right, Alexa Cooperman and Nina Ghalandari prepared frothy beverages for hundreds of visitors to the Town Square Cafe.

From page 1

powers. A black-and-white insert amid the colourful collectibles highlighted a fascinating local connection, creating “Aha” moments for all visitors.

The local historian noted that OPP Officer Sergeant Randall Pepper of Aurora “provided security for The Beatles in 1966 for their Toronto visit. The official story of how the OPP patch arrived on Paul McCartney’s shoulder has been disputed, like how the album was named Sgt. Pepper. Many respected music historians, such as Alan Cross, have quoted the Aurora officer as the inspiration.”

Aurora’s connection to The Beatles’ Sgt Pepper album synced nicely with the 60th Anniversary of the Fab Four’s final concert at Maple Leaf Gardens. One of the reasons the Beatles stopped touring was that they couldn’t hear themselves on stage due to the screaming of their female fans.

Rob Gaby, a local resident who attended a Beatles concert in 1964 at Maple Leaf Gardens, remembers the hysteria of Beatlemania: “I was 11 in 1964. My buddy Gary had these comp tickets. I knew some of their songs, so I decided to go. My four sisters were so upset that I got Beatles tickets — my 18-year-old sister was really ticked off that I was going.”

Gaby’s recollection of the concert is reminiscent of the opening to Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities* — “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.”

“Gary and I went. We were in the blues. We were surrounded by girls. We were the only guys in that section of the blues,” he said. “We got an idea about what the crowd would be like when they booed the warm-up act — Diana

Ross and the Supremes — off the stage. Everyone had come to see The Beatles.”

The long-time resident laughs at the next part of his recollection: “It was tame until they came on stage. The girls turned into lunatics and lost their marbles. It was by far the worst concert I’d ever gone to. They totally lost it with ‘I Want to Hold Your Hand.’ It was somewhat frightening. It was too bad we couldn’t hear anything but the screaming.”

Gaby continued, “To top it all off, we were almost trampled by them as we were leaving the Gardens using the Wood Street exit. As we’re in the corridor, a girl screamed ‘There’s Ringo,’ and a stampede started. Gary and I ran for our lives. Luckily, the flag and glass that I bought at the concert survived the stampede, and I still have them to this day.”

It was, indeed, a day to reflect fondly on one’s cultural memories and artifacts.

Heard’s Heritage Week exhibition moved seamlessly from “A Motivating Historic Vinyl Analog Experience” based on The Beatles on the second floor to the comfy confines of the ground floor café.

The personable historian could be heard upstairs introducing a sequence of songs as part of Dave’s Vinyl Party that filled the entire Museum and Cultural Centre with the soulful sounds of Dan Fogelberg, Gordon Lightfoot, and The Beatles, to name a few. Heard had just deejayed a Valentine’s Day event at the Museum and Cultural Centre, so the host was in fine form in the wide open spaces of the café.

It was an idyllic setting for a chat. Skaters could be seen enjoying the outdoor ice track behind Heard, and dozens of ‘My Indie Coffee’ customers engaged in the music and sipped frothy

beverages prepared by baristas Nina Ghalandari and Alexa Cooperman. The dynamic duo prepared a perfect London Fog for this writer. The Earl Grey concoction steamed away while Heard discussed his connection to the space in which he was presenting: “It’s a nice way to spend a day-- in a space like this—in a café environment.”

Heard made a sudden departure from our table back to his turntable, where he changed records, introduced the song for his audience, and resumed our chat.

Heard glanced behind him at the restored outer walls of the Aurora Public School — some of which are interior surfaces in the renovated Cultural Centre — and chatted about his familial links to the structure erected in 1886: “My mother and father attended this school in the 1930s. My mom was an educator for three decades at this school and others in the community, so I feel connected to my parents when I’m playing my music beside the school they attended. My family has roots in Aurora all the way back to 1802.”

The curator’s connection to the Town extended to Aurora’s agricultural traditions, which were celebrated for decades in an annual Aurora Horse Show. Heard’s historic vinyl presentation, entitled “Music, Ambience, Love, and Heritage,” was a tribute to not only the joys of analog music but to the memories he had of the Horse Show.

Heard’s “Mane” attraction featured 100 square feet of albums and artifacts celebrating Aurora’s equine history. The congenial curator explained the selection process for his multi-hued floor mural and the tunes that captured visitors’ eyes and ears.

“I’m glad I did this as a historian. I feel such a deep connection to the Horse Show and pulled out 617 of my albums with horses on the covers. I culled it to 105 for the display,” said Heard.

“This is the right space to do this — a few hundred people have come through. We have a contest where visitors guess how many horses are on display in the mural of albums. The process of looking over the albums and guessing the number allows people to fall into a peaceful setting and into the mural so

they can take their mind off the problems of the day.”

A steady stream of visitors spent time counting images of horses and slipped their entries into the contest box. Remarkably, Heard’s equine presentation attracted one of Canada’s most famous Olympic riders.

“Even Jim Elder came by today,” said Heard. “But the highlight of my day was just making this event.” He paused to express his gratitude about recovering from a challenging illness: “Here we are — whatever higher power has given me the opportunity to enjoy this day — for me and the guests. I’m so glad to be in this central hub.”

This kind of outdoor and indoor hub is surely what the Town of Aurora planners had in mind when they developed this public space to recreate and reflect on the heritage that is at the heart of our community.

Kathleen Vahey — a curator for the Aurora Historical Society and curator manager of Hilary House — was pleased to see so many cultural partners preparing exhibitions at the Museum and Cultural Centre.

“I find it valuable that all the heritage organizations are all at one place to bring an awareness to people in Aurora,” she said. “It’s a great opportunity to see all the places you can go in Town.”

Vahey — who did a cameo in the recent documentary *Silver Screamers*, which debuted at Aurora Town Square in the Fall — has seen Hilary House used as a setting for a short horror film and knows the value of residents being able to access the historical sites in Town.

“We’re open five days a week, and we open Saturdays during the Summer,” she said.

Just the thought of Summer after a harsh Winter brought another level of existential relief on Family Day. My relaxing afternoon at Aurora Town Square provided a range of sensory experiences: a delectable London Fog, soulful sounds, an engaging visit with an expert on local history and analog music, an amusing reflection on a Beatles concert 62 years ago, and inspirational visual displays. All were part of the spirited kickoff events for Aurora’s Heritage Week.

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Arctic Adventure Brings Festive Fun



Aurora Town Square and Aurora Town Park featured a fun and festive atmosphere on Feb. 14 and Feb. 16 as hundreds of people enjoyed the two-day Arctic Adventure event. Attendees enjoyed crafts, games, ice displays, and various demonstrations. The Great Canadian Lumberjack Show entertained audiences on Family Day (Feb. 16), with axe throwing, chainsaw carving, wood chopping and cross-cut sawing.

Auroran photos by Glenn Rodger

Centre aims to be “cultural leader, hub” as it charts its five-year plan



BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

When culture thrives at the centre of civic life, people have a strong sense of belonging.

This is the guiding principle for the Aurora Cultural Centre as they chart a path for the future.

The Aurora Cultural Centre has brought music, visual arts, and much more to the community since it was first established 15 years ago. Now, as they look ahead to 2030, they aim to become a “recognized cultural leader” here at home and beyond Aurora.

The Aurora Cultural Centre’s 2026 – 2030 Strategic Plan was formally presented to Council last month by Mary Ann McConkey and Morry Patoka, President and Vice President of the Aurora Cultural Centre Board of Directors, respectively.

“We began with this simple concept: when culture thrives at the centre of civic life, people don’t just attend events, they know they belong here,” said Patoka. “This is the heart and soul of our 2026 – 2030 Strategic Plan. You feel it when you walk through Aurora Town Square, the buzz of conversation swirling through five different art galleries, the energy of concert-goers around both performance halls, and the flow of creativity as people from all walks of life engage in arts education.”

The Town’s ongoing funding for the Centre, he said, was an “integral part of the economic engine that makes our plan possible,” and of equal value is “the deeply collaborative relationship” with Mayor, Council, and municipal staff “working together to make sure that the cultural heart of our community thrives at the centre of civic life at Aurora Town Square.”

“For 15 years, we’ve built this relationship – a bond, really – based on transparency, accountability and integrity, giving us the confidence that we will achieve our vision to be broadly recognized as a cultural leader and artistic hub for Aurora,” Patoka continued. “What does that really mean? It means human impact: a child’s enthusiastic return to an art camp, a senior rediscovering her love of painting, a newcomer’s first concert in Canada, where everyone claps along to popular songs.

“It also means community impact. Our programming brings people from all walks of life together, sharing experiences that build trust, and where trust grows, friendships grow, civic pride grows. Being a cultural leader and artistic hub for Aurora means driving economic activity. In addition to creating jobs and volunteer positions in our Town, we draw residents and visitors to Aurora Town Square, supporting local cafes, restaurants, and retailers before and after the events.”

While Patoka underscored the economic impacts of the Centre’s plan, he stressed they are focused on “keeping programming accessible, keeping prices low, keeping art galleries free,” three factors he said set the Aurora Cultural Centre apart from similar organizations.

“Our mission is straightforward. As a not-for-profit charitable organization, we offer excellent and inclusive experiences, celebrate diverse voices, and connect people through live performances, visual arts, and arts education. We ground this with core values that matter to our Town: excellence, collaboration, inclusivity, artistic integrity, responsible governance, and stewardship,” he said. “Our plan is very laser-focused: establish the center as a recognized cultural leader and artistic hub, strengthen community connection, continue to build and diversify revenue, enhance connections with audiences, amplify programming, and strengthen capacity.

“Stronger community connection, broader reach and recognition, and enduring organizational sustainability to enrich people’s lives and enrich our community. Our strategy is supported by annual operating plans to be accountable for our deliverables, driving measurable human, community, and economic impact for Aurora, attracting more visitors, more spending, more businesses and residents, expanding our ability to feature more artists, more shows, more arts education, and reinforce the value of Aurora as an awesome civic destination.”

The Strategic Plan was warmly received by Council.

Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo, who was part of the process leading up to the document, said he was particularly struck by one passage within the plan itself: “We are a welcoming space, a third space, beyond home and work, where everyone belongs, where creativity is contagious, and where imagination finds a home.”

“I look forward to many, many exciting things that happen at the Centre,” he said.

Added Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner: “I have never seen such a hard-working board during my time. I was just completely amazed.”

Ward 4 Councillor Michael Thompson said he was looking forward to seeing the implementation of the plan take the Centre from “great to greater.”

In receiving the Plan, Mayor Mrakas noted the work the Centre did in overcoming challenges related to being displaced from the historic Church Street School for the duration of Aurora Town Square construction.

“There have been challenges along the way with the development of Town Square and the things that we did, but we persevered together as a group – the Cultural Centre, the Town, all of us working together – and each day it

continues to grow and the hard work of all of us working together is paying off,” he said. “We’re seeing that now through the strategic plan you guys are presenting to us today and how we look to move forward into the future.”

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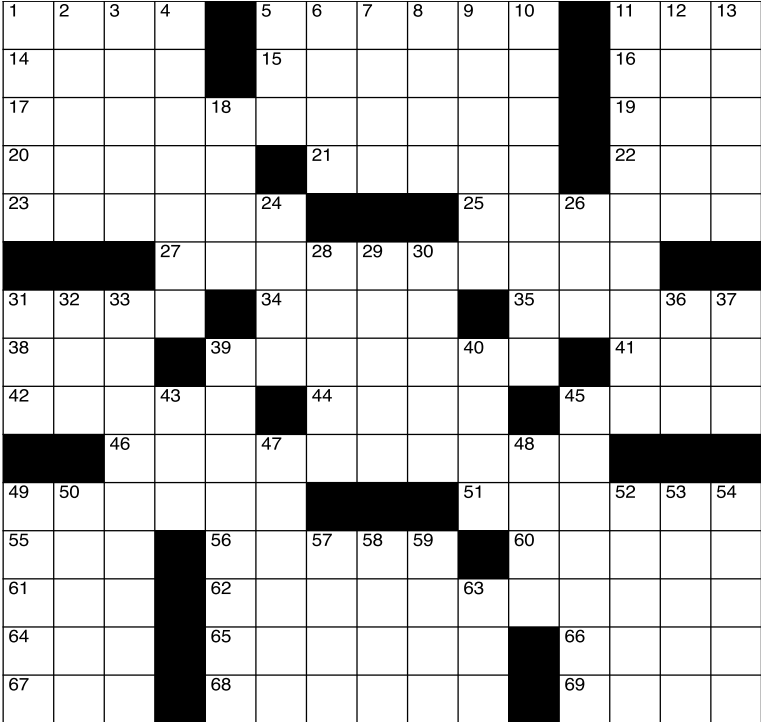
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CLUES ACROSS

- 1. Cut quickly
- 5. A way to state clearly
- 11. River in NE Scotland
- 14. Expansive
- 15. Lacking social polish
- 16. Amount of time
- 17. Frame
- 19. Automobile
- 20. Toadstools
- 21. High school dances
- 22. Utilize
- 23. Experimented with
- 25. One-sided
- 27. Acquisitive
- 31. Potted plants
- 34. Everyone has one
- 35. Kalahari Desert lake
- 38. Unidentified flying object
- 39. People 65 and over

- 41. Small amount
- 42. Daughter of Acrisius
- 44. Ornamental box
- 45. Government agents
- 46. Uncertain
- 49. A cotton fabric with a satiny finish
- 51. Treeless plains
- 55. One's sense of self-importance
- 56. Consumer advocate
- 60. Type of lounge
- 61. Body part
- 62. Can be persuaded
- 64. Woman (French)
- 65. Ready and willing to be taught
- 66. Arab ruler title
- 67. Unhappy
- 68. Gradually went away
- 69. Able to think clearly

CLUES DOWN

- 1. Brushed
- 2. Small water spirit (Germ.)
- 3. Heroes
- 4. Monetary units
- 5. Some don't want to share theirs
- 6. Free-swimming invertebrate
- 7. Litigates
- 8. Outer
- 9. Parallelograms
- 10. Uneasy feelings
- 11. Cross
- 12. A way to remove
- 13. Pages can be dog-__
- 18. Ukrainian city
- 24. A citizen of Denmark
- 26. Month
- 28. Hindu queens
- 29. Group of chemicals
- 30. Rider of Rohan
- 31. Wet dirt
- 32. Southwestern Russia city
- 33. Observed
- 36. Angry
- 37. Drivers' licenses
- 39. Musical composition
- 40. Auction
- 43. They __
- 45. Women
- 47. Be filled with love for
- 48. Thick-soled sock
- 49. Appears
- 50. Old World lizard
- 52. The leading performer
- 53. Protein
- 54. "Gunga Din" script writer
- 57. Art __, around 1920
- 58. __ Blyton, children's author
- 59. Abnormal breathing
- 63. A place to rest

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THINGS... you ought to know

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 19
AHS Speaker Series: Samantha George "Parkwood National Historic Site" – 7 p.m., virtual via Zoom. Join the Aurora Historical Society for the first Speaker Series event of 2026. Samantha George, Curator of Parkwood National Historic Site in Oshawa, will introduce audiences to the domestic stories of the McLaughlin Family, who called the large estate home. Members: \$10.50/\$12.50 non-members. Tickets can be purchased on the AHS website (www.aurorahs.com) or by calling 905-727-8991.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 21
York Symphony Orchestra Presents: A Night at the Opera tonight at 8 p.m. at Trinity Anglican Church, Aurora. (79 Victoria Street). Be there to hear some of Canada's rising opera stars -- Sopranos Nicole Dubinsky and Angela Sanchez, Tenor Ross Mortimer and Baritone John Holland -- perform arias and duets by the giants of the opera stage, plus some of the most popular orchestral music of opera from Mozart, Rossini, Bizet, Offenbach, Donizetti, Verdi and Puccini.

THURSDAY, MARCH 19
AHS Speaker Series: Heison Chak "Toronto's Lost Shipwreck" – 7 p.m., at Aurora Town Square or Virtual via Zoom. Hosted by the AHS in partnership with the Aurora Museum & Archives. Join us for a presentation by Heison Chak as he explores the four pillars of exploration through the recent rediscovery of a 200-year-old schooner in Toronto. Discover how modern technology and local research brings maritime heritage to life - showing that world-class discovery can begin close to home. Tickets can be purchased on the AHS website (www.aurorahs.com) or by calling 905-727-8991.

SATURDAY, MARCH 28
Introduction to Paper Quilting. 1 p.m. Have you ever wanted to try paper quilting? In this introductory workshop, you will create a greeting card/piece of art using this easy to learn heritage craft. Workshop includes all materials. Taking place in the beautiful Hillary House

National Historic Site Ballroom (2nd floor). Enjoy light refreshments, a short tour of Hillary House, and shop in the Gift Shop. Tickets can be purchased on the AHS website (www.aurorahs.com) or by calling 905-727-8991.

ONGOING
Partagez le Français: Ce groupe accueille les ADULTES / 18+ (des francophones aux débutants capables de converser) - qui cherchent à mettre en pratique leurs compétences Conversationnelle en français. Over Zoom with a nominal fee of \$2.50. RSVP by visiting meetup.com/Partagez-le-francais. For more information, visit www.meetup.com/partagez-le-francais.

Support AbuseHurts' Delivering Hope Full Circle Program textile recycling and donation program. A greater number of people are wanting to donate or get rid of unwanted items, increasing the need for more outlets being available to receive the items. This program will provide a convenient way for people to donate or get rid of used/unwanted clothing, blankets, linens and furniture and will help lessen the amount of items ending up in landfills. Materials that were previously perceived as waste will now be seen as a valuable resource further encouraging redistribution. The items will be recycled in the following ways: To be given to individuals who are survivors of violence and are transitioning from shelters into new homes; To be sold in our store; To be sold to a textile recycler, which makes for an ongoing source of funding for Abuse Hurts enabling them to provide their services to the thousands of people that require them each year. When and Where: Monday and Wednesday, every week, 10 a.m. – 4 p.m., with 30-minute time slots – only 1 drop off per time slot. If you do not have an appointment, we cannot accept your donation. The Abuse Hurts Warehouse is located at 1208 Gorham St, Unit 4, Newmarket - rear unloading dock. Visit AbuseHurts.ca to select your drop off time slot.

CANADA FLAG DAY



The York Region Federal Liberals Collaborative (York Region Liberal EDAs) and the Communications Team gathered on Feb. 15, to celebrate Canadian Flag Day, marking the birthday of Canada's flag. Pictured in this photo are former MP Tony Van Bynen (Newmarket–Aurora), former MP Leah Taylor Roy (Aurora–Richmond Hill), and current MP Helena Jaczek (Markham–Stouffville).

Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger

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AVENUE REALTY TEAM

Defining
excellence
in luxury
real estate



In a real estate landscape that continues to evolve with shifting buyer priorities, economic cycles, and lifestyle demands, one thing remains constant: expertise matters. For more than four decades, Avenue Realty Team has stood as a trusted pillar in Ontario's luxury real estate market, earning its reputation as a premier source for high-end properties through experience, precision, and commitment to excellence.

Founded by Emily Fusco in 1987 in Richmond Hill, Avenue Realty Team has been deliberately focused on the luxury estate home market since its inception. This specialized segment of acreage and estate-level properties as well as one-of-a-kind custom homes, has always been the foundation of their work — not simply a part of their business. Their depth of knowledge, developed through decades of hands-on experience, has given the team an intimate understanding of every detail and nuance that defines this market. This focus on elevated living, privacy, and architectural distinction has firmly positioned Avenue Realty Team as recognized experts and a go-to authority for buyers and sellers navigating the upper tier of the residential landscape.

Luxury real estate is not defined solely by price or square footage. It is defined by nuance. Estate homes require a keen eye for detail — from the value of land and location to architectural integrity, craftsmanship, and long-term lifestyle appeal. Avenue Realty Team understands that these properties are not commodities; they are highly personal assets that represent a way of life. Properly pricing and presenting these homes demands a level of expertise that only comes with years of immersion in this space.

At the helm of Avenue Realty Team are Emily Fusco and Christopher Fusco, whose combined experience in the real estate industry exceeds 60 years. Together, they have guided clients through the ebbs and flows of the housing market — from periods of rapid expansion to economic uncertainty and shifts in buyer behaviour. This long-term perspective allows them to approach every transaction with clarity, strategy, and confidence.

When Emily founded Avenue Realty Team in 1987 after leaving the corporate world, she did not take the conventional route of a new realtor. Rather than easing into the business, she stepped directly into the high-end residential market — a space she instinctively understood and connected with. From the outset, her ability to work with discerning clients and complex luxury properties led to early and sustained success. That foundation continues to shape the team today, with Emily's experience, insight, and hands-on approach setting the standard for how luxury estate homes are represented and sold.

Christopher, brings a distinctive strength to the team through his deep-rooted understanding of diverse cultural business and negotiation practices. With an established global network of associates and long-standing professional relationships around the world, Christopher offers clients an advantage that extends well beyond local market knowledge. His approach is professional, proactive, and grounded in providing clients with the information they need to make educated, empowered decisions. His focus is not on pressure or persuasion, but on rational

strategy — ensuring clients are positioned to optimize their objectives at every stage of the process.

This attention to detail is evident in the way Avenue Realty Team showcases its listings — none more so than one of their current active offerings at 140 Rebecca Court for \$9,950,000. Situated on a private 2.11-acre lot, this remarkable estate home exemplifies the elevated living that defines the luxury market. Featuring five bedrooms plus three additional rooms and ten bathrooms, the residence offers expansive yet intentional living spaces designed for comfort, functionality, and refined entertaining.

The home's superb and elegant finishes reflect a commitment to quality throughout, while its surrounding, lush, serene grounds create a sense of retreat rarely found within reach of urban amenities. Encircled by a blend of coniferous and deciduous trees, the property offers exceptional privacy and a seamless connection to nature — a hallmark of luxury estate living. It is a home designed not only to be lived in, but to be experienced.

For buyers seeking space, discretion, and an elevated daily lifestyle, properties like 140 Rebecca Court represent the growing appeal of luxury estates. In a world that feels increasingly fast-paced and crowded, privacy, control, and connection to nature have

become some of the most sought-after luxuries. Avenue Realty Team understands this shift intimately and has adapted its approach to reflect what buyers in this market truly value.

What sets Avenue Realty Team apart is not just their longevity, but their ability to evolve while staying grounded in fundamentals. They recognize that luxury real estate requires more than marketing — it requires insight, and a deep respect for the uniqueness of each property and client. Their success lies in their ability to highlight a home's story, lifestyle potential, and long-term value while navigating negotiations with precision and discretion.

As the luxury real estate market continues to grow in complexity, Avenue Realty Team remains a steady, trusted presence. Their legacy, expertise, and dedication to detail have made them a leading force in Ontario's high-end real estate landscape — and a clear choice for those seeking guidance at the highest level.

For clients who view real estate not just as a transaction, but as an investment in lifestyle and legacy, Avenue Realty Team continues to set the standard. To learn more about Avenue Realty and view their active listings, visit avenurealty.com.

Written by: Brittany Grecni



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Beautiful brick bungalow & gorgeous landscaped lot w/spacious 2 car garage & lots of upgrades! Fabulous reno'd kitchen is open to dining room w/walkout to covered deck & private south exposure backyard. Large living room has crown moulding & a separate nook w/built-in office desk. Great finished basement w/very large bedroom, lovely recreation room, 3 pc bath & office area! Minutes to shopping, rec centre, parks. Hwy 404 & GO train! Renos: kitchen reno (2021), new windows (2014), new well (2012), 25 year shingles (2013), new main floor flooring (2024)!

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\$889,000

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WHEN YOUR HOME FEELS TOO SMALL

A move-up plan for families nervous about today's market

If your home is starting to feel tighter than it used to — one more activity bag by the door, one more Zoom call from the kitchen table, one more argument over quiet space — you're not alone. Many families in King and the surrounding communities are craving more room, but they're hesitant to make a move in a market that feels slower and uncertain compared to the past few years.

Here's the good news: a slower, more balanced "buyer's market" can actually help families who need to move up — as long as you approach it with a clear plan and realistic numbers.

WHY FAMILIES FEEL STUCK RIGHT NOW

The hesitation we hear most often sounds like this:

- "What if we sell and can't find the right house?"
- "What if we buy and then our home doesn't sell?"
- "What if we move and then prices change again?"

Those concerns are completely valid — and they're exactly why strategy matters. In a slower market, the "wing it and hope" approach isn't kind to anyone. But a measured plan can turn uncertainty into confidence.

THE UPSIDE OF A SLOWER MARKET FOR MOVE-UP FAMILIES

Families usually assume a hot market is better because homes sell quickly. But for move-up buyers — people who are both selling and buying — a frenzied market can be stressful and expensive.

A calmer market can work in your favour in a few important ways:

More choice and less pressure.

When there's more inventory and fewer bidding wars, you can shop more thoughtfully. That often means a better neighbourhood fit, a better layout, and fewer compromises.

Stronger negotiating power.

In slower conditions, buyers may have room to negotiate on price, closing dates, included items, or repairs. That flexibility can be a big help when you're coordinating a sale and purchase.

Better timing control.

Sellers are often more open to flexible closings. That can help families align school schedules, childcare, and work routines — and reduce the chances of needing temporary housing.

Fewer "overpay" moments.

In rapid-fire markets, many move-up buyers felt pressured to stretch beyond their comfort zone. A steadier pace can reduce that risk and keep decisions grounded.

Yes, it may take a more deliberate approach to sell — but buying can be far less chaotic. And for families moving up, that balance can be a real advantage.

THE MOVE-UP CHALLENGE ISN'T "THE MARKET" — IT'S COORDINATION

The biggest stress point for most move-up families is timing the sale and the purchase in a way that protects you financially and keeps life manageable.

That's why the first step isn't jumping into house tours — it's building a plan. Depending on your comfort level, finances, and timeline, there are a few common routes:

- **Sell first, then buy** (often the lowest risk, with a clearer budget)
- **Buy first, then sell** (when equity and financing support it)
- **A conditional purchase** (in a slower market, some sellers may be more open to this than they were in peak frenzy)
- **Long or flexible closing dates** to create breathing room on either side

There's no one-size-fits-all. The right path is the one that matches your family's risk tolerance and schedule.

WHAT MAKES THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE IN A SLOWER MARKET

A successful move-up doesn't require perfection — it requires clarity and preparation:

Start with what "more space" really means.

Is it another bedroom? A finished basement? Two home offices? A better yard? A different school catchment? Getting specific saves time and prevents "house-hopping" fatigue.

Know your true numbers — not just online estimates.

In a slower market, pricing precision matters. A smart plan includes an accurate local comparable analysis, realistic purchase options based on today's inventory, and a clear picture of monthly comfort (not just maximum approval).

Make your current home an "easy yes."

Buyers can be more selective when the pace slows. Presentation, pricing, and marketing that clearly



shows how a home functions for family living reduces hesitation — and hesitation is the real deal-killer in a buyer's market.

HOW WE HELP FAMILIES MOVE UP WITHOUT THE PANIC

We work with move-up families every year, and the goal is always the same: more space, less stress, and a plan you can feel good about. Our process focuses on aligning the sale and purchase, creating timeline options, and guiding you through negotiation on both sides so you're not making emotional decisions under pressure.

If you're feeling cramped but unsure whether now is the right time, you don't need to decide today — you just need clarity. We're happy to provide a no-pressure Move-Up Plan: what your home could sell for in today's market, what your next-home options look like, and a few strategy routes that make the timing work.

Real Advice. Real Options. Real Estate.

To start your Move-Up Plan, contact Michele Denniston at 416-433-8316 or michele@micheledenniston.com.

WRITTEN BY: The Michele Denniston Real Estate Team

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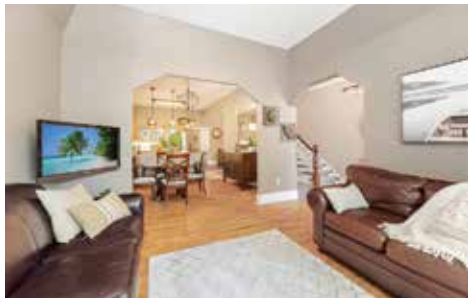
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A HOME-BUYING guide for **empty nesters**

The day a child leaves home can be bittersweet for parents. Although a son or daughter being successful and mature enough to move on to new opportunities can be a source of pride, parents typically lament the quiet that comes from empty rooms and a change to the daily routine they'd grown accustomed to when the kids were around. After some time, some couples decide to downsize to a home more befitting the empty nester lifestyle.

Downsizing presents an option for homeowners whose kids have left the nest. New analysis from a survey of 2,500 empty nesters commissioned by Regency Living found that 30 percent of empty nesters choose to downsize and move from their original family homes. When retirement is just around the corner, many professionals shift focus to how they want to live and where. Moving to a new home presents plenty of opportunities for older adults, including a chance to choose a home based on what's right for them in this stage of life. There are questions homeowners can ask themselves as they ponder if downsizing is right for them.

1 HOW MUCH UPKEEP CAN I HANDLE?

A lifelong family home may be well-loved, but chances are it requires significant upkeep and repairs. Empty nesters may choose to move on to a

home that offers lifestyle benefits like less maintenance. Homes in lifestyle communities or those overseen by a homeowners' association tend to have certain maintenance built into a monthly fee.

2 IS THIS LAYOUT STILL A FIT?

Many empty nesters may not immediately feel the effects of aging, but before selecting a next home, individuals should think about aging in place and any unique needs they may have. Opting for a single-level home, or at least one with the owner's suite on the main level, can be advantageous.

3 CAN I MAKE DUE WITH LESS SQUARE FOOTAGE?

A cavernous home with many rooms often isn't desirable for empty nesters. All of that square footage requires heating, cooling and maintenance. Rattling around inside a big, empty house may precipitate the decision to downsize. Downsizing also can free up home equity, which can be used to fund retirement needs.

4 WHICH FEATURES DO YOU DESIRE?

Many empty nesters want the next home to focus on some luxury items they may have bypassed in the first home when priorities lay elsewhere. Upscale environments like gourmet kitchens, spa-like bathrooms and outdoor living spaces may be in the budget when moving into a home with a smaller footprint.

5 WILL MY HOME BE SECURE WHILE I TRAVEL?

Empty nesters might want to choose homes in gated communities or condominium complexes for safety reasons. Should they opt to spend a portion of time at a vacation rental or second home as snowbirds, secure communities enable residents to leave their primary residence with the peace of mind that those homes will be less vulnerable to thieves.

6 DOES THIS HOME HAVE ENOUGH LIGHT?

The American Optometric Association says many adults start to have problems seeing clearly beginning at age 40. Homes with more light from large windows and artificial lighting can reduce accident risk.

Moving to a smaller home is a consideration for many empty nesters. Various features offer benefits to adults who want to age in place.



MARKET UPDATE – JANUARY 2026

AURORA

AVERAGE SALES PRICE

\$1,238,516

AVERAGE 53 DAYS ON MARKET

NUMBER OF SALES

31

112 NEW LISTINGS

SALE TO LIST RATIO

95%

YEAR OVER YEAR % CHANGE

-10.14%

KING

AVERAGE SALES PRICE

\$1,826,667

AVERAGE 108 DAYS ON MARKET

NUMBER OF SALES

9

64 NEW LISTINGS

SALE TO LIST RATIO

93%

YEAR OVER YEAR % CHANGE

-9.05%

*The statistics provided were obtained from the Toronto Regional Real Estate Board's Market Watch JANUARY 2026; Summary of Existing Home Transactions for All Home Types, JANUARY 2026 + Focus on the MLS Home Price Index for Composite, JANUARY 2026 for York Region's Aurora and King

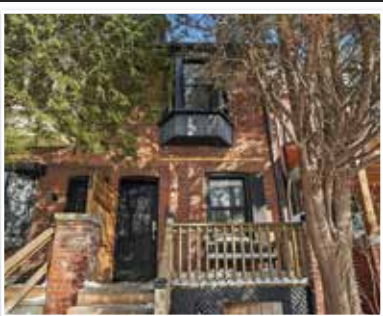
In York Region, average sales prices declined in 2025 versus 2024 year over year, inventory grew and sales volume declined. These trends have carried through to the start of 2026, with subdued demand relative to past years. We have definitely tilted towards a buyer's market with elevated inventory, selling time and softening prices. 2026 suggests continued price adjustments and more negotiating power for buyers. Sellers will need competitive pricing/marketing to transact in this lower market. It is worth noting that beautifully appointed homes, that are sharply priced, are selling in less days than industry averages.

The market has shifted and it has never been more imperative to align yourself with a knowledgeable real estate advisor, where the guidance on the sale of your biggest investment is protected, and the best outcome is garnered. On the purchase side, the negotiation skills of your advisor assures your best interests are protected, and your purchase is negotiated for the strongest results. In an evolving market, Key Advantage is always here as a trusted advisor to talk strategy.

– Provided by Key Advantage Team Royal LePage RCR Realty
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Tips to make a bedroom a more *relaxing space*

Homes are often characterized as sanctuaries. A home's interior spaces can provide a respite from the hustle and bustle of daily life no matter what's going on in the outside world.

Perhaps no space inside a home should be more relaxing than a bedroom. But bedrooms are not impervious to the hectic pace of life unless homeowners make a concerted effort to transform these spaces into relaxing respites. By implementing a variety of strategies, homeowners can ensure bedrooms embody the notion that homes are sanctuaries for their residents.

• INSTALL NEW WINDOW TREATMENTS
Blinds, curtains, shades, and other window treatments come in a variety of styles and colors, ensuring there's at least one out there that can match an existing design scheme in a bedroom. Window treatments can be utilized to create a cozy vibe in a

bedroom, blocking out lights from outside, including natural light from the sun and moon but also street lamps and decorative lights from neighboring properties. This can ensure bedrooms are a peaceful and welcoming respite when homeowners and residents return home each night.

• MAKE THE ROOM A DEVICE-FREE ZONE
If escapism is an end goal, then turning a bedroom into a device-free zone is a must. Televisions, tablets and smartphones ensure the distractions and stressors of everyday life are never too far away, so removing these devices from bedrooms can help to establish a more peaceful bedroom environment. In addition,

the National Sleep Foundation reports that using devices in a bedroom tends to reduce sleep duration by delaying the time users go to sleep.

• RECONSIDER THE LIGHTING
Bedroom lighting is another variable that merits consideration when trying to transform the space into a more relaxing room. Ambient lighting can be utilized to create a soft and welcoming atmosphere in the room. Dimmable lights also allow residents to adjust the amount of light depending on the time of day. Lights can be bright when getting dressed in the morning, and then turned down when residents are going to bed and want to unwind before closing their eyes.

• CLEAR OUT CLUTTER
A cluttered bedroom is more than an eyesore. The Royal Australian College of General Practitioner notes that clutter can contribute to anxiety and adversely affect individuals' ability to sleep and focus. Examine bedrooms to see if there is any unnecessary or overly bulky furnishings that make the spaces feel cramped and cluttered. Remove those items when possible, or consider working with a contractor to expand the room if budget and space allows.

Bedrooms can be respites within the larger sanctuary that homes are meant to be. That's especially so when residents implement strategies to transform bedrooms into more relaxing spaces.



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Lighting for every room in the home

Lighting in a home is easily overlooked. But power outages serve as a stark reminder of the importance of lighting, which adds to the safety, functionality and aesthetic appeal of a space.

When homeowners go room to room, they can consider various types of lighting to add a unique feel to each space.

KITCHEN

Kitchens are heavily trafficked rooms in many homes. A combination of overhead lighting that will illuminate the entire space and focused task lighting, like under-cabinet lights for meal prep, can help in the kitchen. Separate task lighting for a bill-paying area or homework station also can be a useful touch.

BEDROOM

Bedrooms are cozy retreats where homeowners spend most of their time resting and relaxing. Harsh lighting may not be applicable here, so consider side lamps fitted with warm-hued bulbs placed beside a bed. Lighting can be more stark and targeted in closets to help homeowners see clothing and other belongings.

BATHROOM

Bathroom lighting amenities can include a combination of features to fully optimize this space. Most homeowners will want some sort of overhead lighting to shed light on most of the space. Task lighting by the mirror can offer more visibility while shaving or

applying makeup. Lighting in a bathing area can keep such spaces safer by improving visibility in a generally slippery area. In bathrooms with spa-like settings, mood lighting paired with features like steam capabilities can enhance the space even further.

GARAGE AND BASEMENT

Utility areas like garages, basements and crawl spaces need high-wattage bright lighting for safety. Installation of bright LEDs in these areas can make work projects easier and safer. Well-lit areas also are generally less inviting to pests like insects and rodents, so bright lighting may deter these creatures in areas where they tend to enter a home.

LIVING ROOM/GREAT ROOM

Living areas can benefit from a combination of ambient lighting sources. Table lamps alongside sofas and chairs will provide enough light, but will not compete with televisions or home theater setups. Lighting that highlights artwork or home accents also can add a cozy appeal to the space.

ADDITIONAL LIGHTING

Homeowners may want to consider a few additional lighting scenarios to improve their spaces. Lighting in a foyer or above coat racks or shoe cubbies can keep the space functional but attractive. A combination of overhead lighting and accent lighting can make a laundry room less utilitarian. And dining spaces can be intimate or grandiose depending on the fixtures featured in the room.

Homeowners also can utilize smart devices and bulbs to easily control the lights while at home or away.

Lighting plays a key role in a home, affecting the safety, functionality and aesthetics of rooms.



Home design trends come and go, but one that has inspired a legion of committed followers is the 3-5-7 rule. The 3-5-7 rule is a formula for interior decorating that encourages homeowners to group furnishings in odd numbers. The intention behind such groupings is to ensure homes feel balanced and intentional without sacrificing aesthetic appeal. Adherents to the 3-5-7 rule feel that odd-numbered groupings allow for an ideal blend of scale and height that creates a natural rhythm within interior spaces. Some even insist that odd groupings appear more curated. Size can come into play when pivoting to the 3-5-7 approach to interior design. Three large furnishings can be arranged (i.e., sofa, area rug and a large piece of wall art), five mid-sized items (chairs, coffee table, etc.) and seven small pieces (candles, framed photos, etc.).

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3 ways to get more use out of a garage

EVEN THOUGH NO TWO HOMES are the same, rooms have a tendency to take on similar characteristics regardless of which property they're a part of. Kitchens tend to be popular gathering spaces, while basements have become go-to spots for game rooms and watch parties.

Garages also tend to share certain characteristics between homes, and one notable attribute is the tendency to become difficult-to-navigate dumping grounds for a wide range of items, including lawn and garden tools, children's toys, sporting goods, and seasonal home decor. Though there's nothing wrong with utilizing a garage as a storage space, the following are three simple ways homeowners can get more out of these spaces.

1 UTILIZE THE WALL SPACE. The walls in a garage have lots of potential. Effective use of walls within a garage can ensure garden tools, small toys and other items do not accumulate on the floor. Such accumulations contribute much to the reputation of garages as dumping grounds for miscellaneous items. By clearing the floors of clutter, and utilizing wall spaces to store items, homeowners can open up the spaces to serve any number of functions, including home gyms, art studios or even parking spaces to protect vehicles from the elements. A storage organizer system with various hooks can be mounted on a garage wall to free up floor space, while shelving can be hung to store paint cans, power tool batteries and other items.

2 LOOK UPWARD. If garage ceilings extend several feet above the height of homeowners' vehicles, then the spaces above where cars might be parked can be converted into storage space for large recreational items, like canoes or kayaks, or seasonal decor that does not need to be accessed on a regular basis. A simple kayak hoist utilizing a pulley system clears floor space and allows kayaks to be stored overhead. Lifting storage racks work in similar fashion and make for great additions for anyone who needs to store containers full of seasonal decor but does not want to do so by stacking items on the floor. A hand crank system for a lifting storage rack makes for easy and safe access.

3 WITHOUT AMPLE LIGHTING, garages may not be conducive to recreational pursuits like painting, crafting or even exercising. A lighting upgrade is a relatively affordable renovation that can make a big difference, illuminating spaces not exactly known for brightness, especially if there's no windows. If you want to spend time in the garage during winter and stay warm, then some new lighting can make that possible.



FACTORS TO CONSIDER BEFORE renovating a driveway

Driveways are oft-overlooked components of home exteriors. But driveways provide functionality and points of egress to a home.

Industry experts estimate that a new driveway costs between \$5,000 and \$7,000, though the price will vary based on the materials homeowners choose and the square footage of the driveway.

When deciding whether or not to renovate their driveways, homeowners can review these considerations.

MATERIALS

Driveways can be made from a variety of materials, even grass or soil. The following are some driveway materials homeowners may choose from:

- Gravel
- Chip seal
- Concrete
- Asphalt
- Rubber
- Exposed aggregate
- Pavers
- Permeable pavers
- Heated

REPAIR OR REPLACE?

Nearly any size crack can be patched with concrete or cold-patch asphalt, or specialty materials, according to This Old House, an online home improvement resource. Repairing and resealing a driveway can help prolong its longevity. Plus, this is a more cost-effective option for homeowners on a budget who want to improve curb appeal and safety.

Large holes or unsightly damage may require a driveway replacement. This also will be the case if a homeowner hopes to expand the driveway. Replacing a driveway requires a time commitment. The existing driveway needs to be demolished and removed. The ground underneath typically is smoothed and tamped down. Substrate or wire mesh also may be installed. After the new material is laid, there may be a period of time for settling and curing, during which use of the driveway is prohibited.

DIY OR PROFESSIONAL?

While sealing and minor repairs generally can be handled by a homeowner who has researched the process, large repairs or driveway replacements should be left to professionals for the best results. Driveway slope needs to be considered for proper rain runoff, and the professional will understand the

thickness and preparatory steps necessary to ensure driveway durability. Installation of a heated driveway requires a specific skill set and this is a job best left to professional driveway contractors.

DRIVEWAY ENHANCEMENTS

The options do not end with the driveway material. There are other ways to boost aesthetics.

• **ILLUMINATION:** Homeowners can install recessed LED lights into the driveway to define the edges and add aesthetic appeal.

• **STAMPED TEXTURE:** Homeowners opting for the affordability of concrete can ask for a stamped design that mimics the look of stone or pavers.

• **GATES:** One doesn't have to live in an exclusive community to have their property enhanced by gates. Gates can give a home a distinguished look.

• **EDGING:** Driveways can be edged with another material to create definition between the driveway and lawn, or to provide the perfect spots to plant beds.

Driveway renovations can add curb appeal and improve the functionality of a home.

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When Evel Knievel came to Aurora



By Julien Laurion
Real Estate

Some towns are known for quiet streets, good schools, and strong community roots. Aurora has all of that. But for one brief, imaginary moment this month, it also became the unlikely home of the greatest daredevil who ever lived: Evel Knievel.

In my version of events, it started on an otherwise normal weekday. Emails, phone calls, listings to prep, renovation schedules to juggle. Then the door opened and in walked a man wearing a leather jumpsuit, carrying a helmet like it was an extension of his arm. He didn't waste time with small talk.

"I'm planning my next stunt," he said. "And I hear you're the guy who knows how to build things and sell them." When someone like Evel Knievel asks for help, you don't question the logic. You lean in.

He explained that Aurora had caught his attention. Not Las Vegas. Not Los Angeles. Aurora. A town with room to breathe, space to gather a crowd, and the kind of solid ground that rewards good planning. He needed help finding the right property, designing and building a launch ramp that wouldn't fold under pressure, and making sure the whole thing didn't end in disaster.

In other words, he needed someone who understood big risks — and how to manage them properly.

That's where my two worlds collided.

We started with the land. Evel wasn't looking for flashy. He wanted something practical: wide frontage, strong access points, clear sightlines, and enough space to make the jump dramatic but controlled. Together, we walked properties, talked layout, zoning, and flow. Not unlike helping a client choose a home or a commercial space, except the end use involved a motorcycle at full throttle.

When we found the right spot, he stopped, looked around, and nodded.

"This'll do," he said. "Feels solid."

From there, the contractor brain kicked in. Anyone can build a ramp. Very few people are willing to stand behind one knowing someone will launch themselves off it at speed. Every angle mattered. Every fastener

mattered. No shortcuts. No guesswork. Just proper structure, thoughtful design, and respect for physics.

Evel walked the ramp slowly once it was built. Then again. He tapped the framing with his boot, smiled, and said something that stuck with me:

"Strong bones. That's what keeps you alive."

That line could just as easily apply to houses, businesses, and investments.

As the day of the jump approached, I realized how similar Evel's mindset was to that of so many clients I work with. People making big decisions. People betting on themselves. People taking a leap — not for attention, but for progress. Buying a home. Selling one chapter to start another. Renovating before listing to maximize value. Expanding a business into a new space.

The principle is always the same: bold moves only work when the foundation is right.

On jump day, the town gathered. Engines roared. Evel lined up, took a breath, and went. The ramp held. The landing was clean. Applause erupted. Another impossible moment pulled off by preparation, experience, and a little courage.

Afterward, he shook my hand and said, "You don't just build things. You make them work."

That's the goal — whether the project involves drywall and permits or contracts and keys.

Most of my clients won't ever attempt a motorcycle jump in front of a crowd, and I'm perfectly okay with that. But they are making meaningful leaps. And those leaps deserve smart planning, honest advice, and someone who understands both vision and execution.

Aurora may never be known as Evel Knievel's hometown. But it is a place where big ideas can take shape — safely, strategically, and successfully — when they're built on strong bones.

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