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Aurora's Community Newspaper

TheAuroran.com

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FREE

WEEK OF MARCH 5, 2026



SINGING THE BLUES – Aurora was the place for music-lovers to be this past weekend as the Aurora Cultural Centre hosted the Aurora Winter Blues Festival for the first time since 2019. A resounding success, the Festival featured sold out performances from artists across the country, including Suzie Vinnick and Jay Blues featured here, educational workshops and more. For more, see Pages 12 and 13.

Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger

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Victoria Hall to receive new lease on life following approval of reno budget

Project comes with \$2.2 million price tag

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Historic Victoria Hall will receive a significant overhaul to preserve it for future generations after Council approved a contentious renovation plan

on a vote of 4 – 3.

The decision will see the budget for the long-proposed project increased from the \$500,000 approved this past fall at budget-time to \$2.182 million.

Municipal staff attribute the budget increase to several factors, including the replacement of the floor structure due to previously-undetected dry rot, and replacing the existing addition to the rear of the building with a new structure

to bring it up to code with Provincial accessibility requirements.

Supporting the proposal were Mayor Tom Mrakas, Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland, Ward 4 Councillor Michael Thompson, and Ward 6 Councillor Harold Kim, who agreed the proposals were essential in ensuring the building for future generations. But those who voted against the proposal – Ward 1 Councillor

Continued on page 8

MORTGAGE MAN MARK
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STARTING A MILESTONE YEAR – The 48th Highlanders of Canada were honoured by St. Andrew's College on Friday as they celebrated the start of a milestone year for the independent school, its relationship with the Regiment, and its long-standing ties to Aurora. For more, see Page 23.

Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger

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MODERN LUXURY

This 3650 sq ft + fin. walk up bsmt is an architectural gem perfect for expanded family lifestyle in North Richmond Hill. Airy, open concept design boasts 10 ft cings & expansive windows. Sleek kitchen equipped with premium Miele & Subzero appls, waterfall island & servery w/ walk-in pantry. Spacious family rm w linear frpl + separate office. Huge primary retreat offers a spa inspired ensuite w/ frpl & custom dressing rm. All bdrms w/ ensuite baths & 2nd flr laundry enjoy 9 ft cings. Covered walk up basement w high cings, full in-law suite with kitchen/bar rough in. Sunny South/West views on entertainer's patio w/ Pergola & hot tub. 6 car parking. **\$1,998,000**



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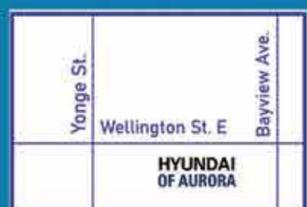
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Sport Aurora honours local excellence at Leisure Complex



Athletes, coaches, builders, and contributors were honoured by Sport Aurora at a mural dedication held at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex on Monday afternoon. **Auroran photo by Brock Weir**

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Athletes, coaches, builders and volunteers who have contributed countless hours to Aurora’s sporting community are being publicly celebrated by Sport Aurora once again – this time at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex.

Members of the Sport Aurora community, an organization that represents 43 local sports clubs, came together at the Complex (AFLC) on Monday afternoon for the unveiling of the Sport Aurora Wall of Excellence.

The Wall of Excellence is a permanent installation at the AFLC recognizing and celebrating the “outstanding achievements, leadership, and contributions of Aurora’s athletes, coaches, builders, and volunteers.”

“This Wall stands as a tribute to those individuals and organizations whose dedication has strengthened

the culture of sport in our community and whose accomplishments have brought distinction to Aurora at the regional, provincial, national and international levels,” said Sport Aurora Executive Director Laurie Mueller prior to the ceremony.

Leading the March 2 event was Sport Aurora President – and Ward 1 Councillor – Ron Weese.

Work on the mural, which was led by Mueller and Neil Moore, began when Sport Aurora’s displays were displaced from the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex during renovations, including the construction of the facility’s gymnasium.

“The Town asked if we would take our displays from the SARC and gave us an opportunity to come here to the AFLC, so we’re quite thankful,” said Weese, giving an additional nod to John Firman of the Town of Aurora for his help and to a Community Services grant “to help make (the display) pretty.”

“The Sport Aurora board approved the move here, so it is partially funded through some of the activities we’ve done, but really what you’re going to see behind [the curtain] is a demonstration of how valuable we think celebration is. Sport Aurora was started 20 years ago... and part of that sustainability has been because we value certain things. We value participation – that’s one of our mission statements to increase the total number of people that are participating in health, physical activity, and sport – and the second thing is capacity building. We try to build capacity through people, as well as supporting the development of facilities anywhere, because, as our Town grows, we need to grow with it.

“The other thing we do, of course, is integration. We try to make things efficient amongst our sport organizations. When you have 43 of them, you have to be trying to do things together. What you’re going to see here is really that togetherness because we value coaches, we value athletes, we value our sponsors, and it’s very important that we recognize them because sport is a very aspirational thing. We hope when people go by here and they see sponsors who have provided money, when they see volunteers who have provided expertise, when they see coaches who come together and help our athletes, and then we see the athletes which are a result of it, I hope everybody is proud of what happens because it’s really something that happens year after year, almost day after day, with Sport Aurora and all of our member organizations.”

Briefly

ELECTRICAL ISSUE CAUSE OF NISBET DRIVE FIRE

An electrical issue is determined to be the cause of a housefire on Nisbet Drive on Sunday evening. Central York Fire Services were called to Nisbet Drive around 8 p.m. on March 1 and the first responders on the scene reported light smoke coming from the first floor of the home. “Fire crews located a fire in the family room in the basement, which was quickly extinguished,” said the CYFS. “All residents self-evacuated prior to the arrival of CYFS. CYFS responded with four trucks and one Chief Officer. Other responding agencies included York Regional Police, York Emergency Medical Services, and Utility Companies.” The CYFS says electrical equipment is the leading cause of housefires in the Province and recommends residents take the following steps to prevent a fire from occurring: Avoid running cords under rugs to prevent damage, and regularly check cords for damage, such as fraying; if you notice a frayed or damaged cord, immediately turn off the appliances and replace the cord with a new one. A damaged cord can expose wires and result in a potential shock or fire hazard; ensure you plug heavy appliances directly into an outlet; do not overheat the outlet – large appliances should have their own outlet. In the event of an emergency, working smoke alarms and a home escape plan can save lives.”

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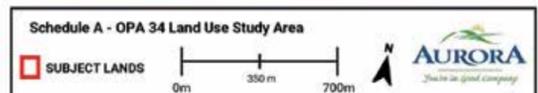
NOTICE OF PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE

A Public Open House is being held to receive input on the Yonge Street Regional Corridor within the OPA 34 Secondary Plan area:

Monday, March 23, 2026
6 to 8 p.m.
Aurora Town Hall,
100 John West Way

Purpose of the Public Open House:

The purpose of the open house is to gather comments and input from the public regarding the Yonge Street Regional Corridor as part of the Yonge Street South Secondary Plan (OPA 34). This public consultation will inform a land use study and Official Plan amendment regarding development standards including size, built-form and densities along this portion of the Yonge Street Regional Corridor.



Additional information:

Any questions regarding this Public Open House or the Yonge Street Regional Corridor Land Use Study can be directed to: Dania Asahi Ogie, Policy Planner, at daogie@aurora.ca.

aurora.ca/publicnotices

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Regional Chair sends message on escalating hostilities in Middle East

On behalf of York Regional Council, today, and every day, our thoughts are with the people of Iran and the escalating hostilities and continued instability across the Middle East.

Many residents here in York Region have family, friends and loved ones directly affected by these events. In times of uncertainty and unrest, the human impact is felt most profoundly by families and communities.

Today, members of our community are gathering in the City of Richmond Hill for a rally in solidarity with anti-government protesters in Iran. We respect the rights of individuals to peacefully assemble and to raise their voices in support of safety, human rights and democratic freedoms.

York Region is one of the most diverse communities in Canada and that diversity is our greatest strength. It connects us to the world, deepens our understanding of one another and reminds us that global events are never far from home. When one part of our community is hurting, we all feel it.

We stand with the people of Iran seeking safety and opportunity. We also stand with our residents here at home who are carrying the weight of worry for loved ones abroad.

At moments like this, our strength lies in compassion, unity and our shared commitment to peace and human rights for all.

Eric Jolliffe
York Region Chairman and CEO

Local Women to “Give to Gain” at sold-out International Women’s Day Celebration in Newmarket

Interest in this year’s International Women’s Day celebration has reached a fever pitch. CFUW Aurora/Newmarket is pleased to announce that their upcoming event on Friday, March 6, 2026, has officially reached its capacity.

While the event is now sold out with a waiting list established, the organizers are preparing for a powerful day of advocacy and community at the Trinity United Church Hall.

The event features keynote speaker Ellen Campbell, founder of Abuse Hurts. Ms. Campbell is a distinguished advocate whose life’s work has earned her the Order of Ontario, the Queen’s Jubilee Medal, and the Ontario Attorney General’s Victim Services Award of Distinction. Her presentation will anchor the theme “Give to Gain,” focusing on how challenging stereotypes and sharing knowledge lead to collective advancement for women and girls.

“The response this year has been truly overwhelming,” says Sandy Esposito, Outreach Chair and Event Coordinator. “We only have room for 100 guests and reaching that limit so quickly speaks to the deep desire for connection and advocacy in our community. We can all give our support to gain advancement for women; sharing our knowledge and encouragement with others is key to that mission.”

While there is no charge to attend, organizers are inviting guests to participate in a spirit of generosity.

Continued on page 25

Machell’s Corners

**Change you can set your watch to**

I’ve never had the best of lucks with clocks.

From the time I first set foot in a school setting at the age of three or four, the tick-tock of the timepiece on the wall was a focal point of learning as we deciphered what those twelve numbers, three hands, and the notches in between translated to. This clock actually had a further ring of twelve numbers inside the main event to teach us not only how to tell time, but do so with military precision.

Still, the tick-tock in a nearly silent classroom never failed to make my hair feel like it was standing on end.

The transition to public school, however, made me embrace the tick-tock a bit more because, it being a school of a certain age, relied on hardwired, plugged-in timepieces where the second hand moved with precision smoothness... and the tick-tock replaced by the dull whir of the motor which irritated my follicles even further!

Still, my luck with clocks hasn’t really improved over... well, time.

A beautifully made cuckoo clock my grandmother brought me back from Austria – no small feat as she was on a shoulder-to-shoulder bus tour of the Alpen countries – met its demise after the bird chirped one too many times in the middle of the night for my father’s taste.

A clock I had long been searching for to add to my collection – it’s a fandom thing – finally and unexpectedly surfaced at a local thrift store, only to break down beyond repair two weeks after I put it on the wall.

At least that was somewhat replaceable. The next example not so much.

We grandchildren didn’t receive much from our grandfather after his death in 2006, but one particular keepsake that came my way was his wristwatch. It wasn’t the watch I remembered him wearing from the earliest memories of my childhood, that had broken some years before, but it was nevertheless an important way to feel I was still keeping him close.

It was a regular feature on my wrist for about three years before it would inexplicably no longer keep time. Three repairs and three fails later were enough to drive home the fact the watch had served its purpose, but it remains a cherished, if now-still reminder of a person who was very important to me.

And, despite being broken, it is, as the old saying goes, still right twice a day.

Whether you rely on a wall-mounted timepiece, a traditional watch, a glance every once in a while at your preferred screen, or on wrist-mounted devices that

**BROCK’S BANTER**

Brock Weir

can apparently do everything but take out your trash, this is a time of year where we find ourselves being clock-watchers a little more often than usual.

We’re set to spring our clocks forward an hour in the wee hours of Sunday morning.

For some, losing an hour of sleep to gain an hour of daylight at the end of the day is a pretty good trade-off – and I’m not going to disagree. As a winter enthusiast, one inextricable element of the season that I absolutely loathe is leaving for work and coming home in the darkness.

For others, the change in time is nothing short of a drag as experts cite the havoc the adjustment has on our bodies, minds and souls, not to mention the increase in traffic accidents and other safety concerns that seem to be part and parcel of our spring-forward-fall-back cycle.

Whether you see it as gaining an hour of light or losing an hour of sleep is a matter of your perspective, although both are, of course, true – but as someone who tries to be optimistic wherever possible, falling back sometimes feels like it offers more possibilities.

You’re gaining an hour, in theory. How are you going to spend it in practice?

Some like to luxuriate in bed on the morning of, the extra hour of sleep well-earned on a lazy Sunday. Others see it as a bonus hour and are eager to get up early to make the most of it, sometimes crowing about all the wonderful things they were able to cram into those 60 minutes “while the world slept.”

This springing-forward is a bit of a mixed bag for me. While I’m one of those perhaps annoying people who sees the bonus hour as an opportunity, this season’s time switch is getting me an hour closer to orthopaedic surgery for which I have been looking forward to for no less than 30 years!

That said, it’s bringing me an hour

closer to a not-until-you’re-40 orthopedic surgery you’ve been looking forward to for no less than 30 years – and that’s an hour that could be spent preparing, double-checking any checklists and, yes, even worrying!

The bright side? Come the fall, I’m certainly going to make the most of that lost hour when the powers-that-be return it to us!

But how much longer will we have to keep shuttling this single hour back and forth, regardless of its consequences to our physical, mental, and emotional health?

Our cousins in British Columbia have the right idea.

This week, everything aligned just right for our west-coasters to break the cycle of Daylight Savings Time and this Sunday’s hour will be their last payment of 60 minutes without expecting a refund.

The switch in British Columbia is not without its critics, but what’s of particular interest is they forged ahead with ditching the system on their own without waiting for the other jurisdictions, particularly Pacific Coast States, to get their acts together and follow suit.

The desire to ditch the system is just as strong in Ontario, but we’re constantly told we can’t make the switch until Quebec and New York are also on board, largely for economic reasons. But while opposition to “the ditch” is minimal in all three areas, it seems the leadership of the same jurisdictions are still waiting to see who is going to blink first.

Who’d have thunk the first to blink was British Columbia?

“The provincial government under former premier John Horgan passed legislation in 2019 to switch to permanent daylight time, but did not set a date for the change as it waited to coordinate with its counterparts in Washington, Oregon, and California,” reported the Times Colonist on Monday. “Those states continue to do spring and autumn time changes. In the U.S., changing the system requires congressional approval.

“We waited, and we waited, and we waited,” said [Premier David] Eby. “I’m here to announce we’re done waiting.” In a statement, the province said, “recent actions from the U.S. have shifted how B.C. approaches decisions that merit alignment, including on time zones.”

The long-term impacts of British Columbia going it alone will be seen over time, but, from my perspective, it sure feels like a step in the right direction.

In fact, it just might be change you can set your watch to.

THE AURORAN

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

EDITOR
Brock Weir
brock@ipcmedia.ca

ADVERTISING
Zach Shoub
zach@ipcmedia.ca

ADVERTISING
Karen Nemet
karen@ipcmedia.ca

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GENERAL MANAGER
Zach Shoub
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ADVERTISING
Diane Buchanan
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PRODUCTION MANAGER
Cynthia Proctor
cynthiap@ipcmedia.ca

TODAY’S NEW HOMES
Zach Shoub
zach@ipcmedia.ca

MOTORING
Heather Erwin
heather@caledoncitizen.com

CLASSIFIEDS
905-727-3300 ex.102
cynthiap@ipcmedia.ca

PHOTOGRAPHY
Glenn Rodger
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DISTRIBUTION MANAGER
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THE AURORA MUSEUM & ARCHIVES IS UNCOVERING...

“Gold as Good as Twenty Orators” (Richard III)



Public speaking has long been a skill that only some are blessed to possess. We all remember giving awkward speeches in front of our peers: a nervous moment but a rite of passage. One hundred years ago, the Literary Society of the Aurora High School took public speaking very seriously, awarding this gold medal (2000.7) to 15-year-old William Stuart for a rousing speech about the then-recent Locarno Treaties between post-WWI European powers. William beat out the previous year's winner, John Blewett (later one of the inventors of the Particle Accelerator), who spoke on navigation and water power. William, you certainly earned your laurels!

There has been considerable community discussion around the Victoria Hall renovation and its potential future uses — so I wanted to ensure all residents had the benefit of the most up to date and factual information.

Let's look back.

In 2025, the Town issued a Request Expression of Interest (REOI) for three Town-owned properties: the Armoury, the café space at Town Square, and Victoria Hall — a process approved by Council. Our goal has always been clear: Town facilities should not sit empty. They should be active community assets that serve residents while generating revenue for taxpayers whenever possible.

This approach is not new. Many municipalities successfully utilize their assets in this way. For example, the Town of Newmarket owns the former Cachet restaurant property and has leased it to a private operator. This is simply smart municipal management — putting public assets to work as part of a thriving community.

Through that REOI process, Council approved lease agreements for the Armoury with Slabtown Cider Co. and for the Town Square café with My Indie Coffee Roasters. For Victoria Hall, staff reported to Council in closed session and Council unanimously gave direction to staff that aligned with the results of the REOI and that would benefit the Town financially and economically while serving the community.

These discussions have involved all members of Council. While no final decision has been made on a potential use for Victoria Hall, Council is fully aware of the conversations and possibilities — just as they were for the Armoury and the café.

It is also important to understand the current reality of Victoria Hall. As a Town asset, the building is sitting empty, unused, in need of repair, and providing no benefit to residents in its current state. Leaving the building as is would amount to demolition by decay — and that is not an option for a site of this historical significance.

As I have stated before, we realistically have three options: renovate, sell, or demolish. I don't believe anyone in our community



GETTING THINGS DONE

Mayor
Tom Mrakas

wants to see this part of our history demolished, nor do we want to sell this important public asset. That leaves renovation as the responsible path forward — so that we preserve the building while creating an asset that can generate a return on investment for residents.

The planned renovations are necessary to bring the building up to today's standards so it can be usable again. This is not a cosmetic renovation. It involves a full restoration — including significant structural, electrical, and mechanical work.

A key component of this work is accessibility. The building is not currently compliant with AODA standards. Any renovation requires that we bring the facility into compliance, and the only feasible location to incorporate accessibility features — such as an accessible entrance — is at the rear of the building. This approach allows us to meet modern standards while preserving the historic front façade, which is an important part of the building's heritage character.

Estimates have also increased due to significant structural issues, particularly with the floor. The building is essentially sitting on dirt, which must be addressed to ensure safety, longevity, and proper preservation of the structure. These are costs that will only continue to grow if renovations are delayed. And I don't believe anyone in our community wants to see this historic asset deteriorate further — or end up paying significantly more down the road for work we already know needs to be done.

It is also important to clarify that the original \$500,000 approved by Council was a placeholder amount. Its purpose

was to signal Council's intent to move forward with the renovation and to provide staff with the initial funding needed to conduct a detailed analysis of the building, including a full assessment of the scope of work required. Through that thorough analysis, we now have a realistic estimate of \$2,182,000 that reflects the true scope of renovations needed to properly restore, renovate and preserve Victoria Hall.

As part of our responsible, long-term fiscal management of Town assets, reserve funds have been built specifically to maintain and protect our infrastructure. This project is being funded from those reserves — exactly what they were created for — and therefore has no impact on the tax rate.

Moving forward with these renovations will transform Victoria Hall into a usable, safe, accessible, and compliant community asset — one that can generate revenue, support economic development in the downtown, and serve residents for generations to come. We will ensure that we look at every way possible to remain within the financial framework so that we are truly investing in an asset that will maintain and grow its value over time.

To reiterate, our goal is to work to ensure no Town-owned building sits empty and underutilized. Our responsibility is to ensure public assets are used to their fullest potential — creating economic benefits, generating revenue, and increasing the long-term value of the property through responsible investment. And one that will not impact the tax rate.

Furthermore, the restoration work required at Victoria Hall is unrelated to any specific future tenant. Once the work is completed to bring the building up to today's standards and Council ultimately approves a lease, the tenant would be responsible for any specialized equipment or renovations needed for their specific operation — not taxpayers.

I will continue to work to ensure that the best interests of our Town and residents remain at the forefront of every decision we make, and I believe it is essential that residents have accurate, factual information when it comes to understanding Council decisions about our community assets.



COSTAS' CORNER

MP Costas Menegakis
Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill

Immigration has long been a pillar of the Canadian story, a testament to the enduring promise of freedom and opportunity. To be an immigrant is to leave behind the familiar in search of a better life, just as my parents did in the 1950s. They, like all newcomers throughout our history, arrived with little more than hope and a hard work ethic. That hope and work ethic turned into a beautiful family, a loving home, and a successful life. My parents' story is one of millions that show a working immigration system is a powerful economic driver, a source of cultural vitality, and reinforces the idea that anyone, regardless of their origin, can live a good life in Canada.

Unfortunately, polling shows the consensus that has sustained public support for immigration is being pushed to a breaking point. Under the Liberals, our immigration system has turned into an unmitigated disaster. By allowing immigration numbers to spiral out of control without a plan to build the necessary capacity in housing, healthcare, or jobs to support them, the Liberals have failed both newcomers and Canadians. What was once a source of national pride has been transformed into a symbol of incompetence and a lack of accountability.

This is most evident in the breakdown in our asylum system. The system is overrun with fraudulent claims, abuse, and a waitlist that will take years to alleviate. Data from the Immigration and Refugee Board showed that between 2019 and 2023, over 24,500 claimants were accepted in Canada without an in-person hearing or questioning. A fair system requires a human element to verify stories and assess credibility; bypassing personal interaction undermines our refugee protections. It invites abuse and allows claimants to be accepted with just a letter in the mail in a vast sea of unverified paperwork.

Further, those who have asylum claims rejected often continue to draw on taxpayer funded healthcare coverage that includes many services which Canadians do not have access to. This includes vision care, physiotherapy, speech-language therapy, and many more! Seniors on fixed incomes or families struggling with rising costs can only dream of this level of coverage. We are a compassionate country, but our primary responsibility must be to our citizens. Maintaining a “gold-standard” of benefits for those who have no legal right to remain in Canada, at a time where Canadians face long wait times at hospitals and pay out-of-pocket for medical expenses, is fundamentally unjust.

The cost to taxpayers for this program reached \$1 billion in 2025. By comparison, the Cortellucci Vaughan Hospital cost \$1.7 billion to build. This means that every two years the Liberals spend on ‘gold-standard’ health coverage for those with no legal right to remain in Canada, we could have fully funded a brand-new hospital in our own community.

While Liberals dish out dollars to asylum claimants with no legal right to be in Canada, their soft on crime policies have created a growing trend of “relaxed sentencing”. Non-citizens are receiving lighter punishments specifically to avoid the 6-month threshold that triggers deportation. This practice creates a two-tiered justice system where the primary concern is not the gravity of the crime or the safety of the victim, but the immigration status of the perpetrator.

When the government allows the threat of removal to dictate judicial outcomes, it sends a message that our laws are flexible depending on who commits the crime. We have seen examples where lighter sentences were given to criminals who are non-citizens, for very serious crimes, so that their immigration status would not be affected and they would not be deported. Prioritizing someone's right to stay in Canada should never supersede the rights of Canadians to feel safe in their own communities.

The path forward requires a return to the principles that once made our system the envy of the world: order, transparency, and fairness. Immigration levels must be aligned with our actual capacity to house and support newcomers, ensuring they can succeed upon arrival. We need to restore mandatory in-person interviews for asylum seekers to protect the integrity of the process and ensure that resources go to those in genuine need. Above all, we must ensure that the law is respected and that our borders are secure. By replacing the Liberals' chaotic immigration system with a Conservative one that is based on order, transparency, and fairness, we can restore public trust and ensure that our immigration system becomes a strength for Canada once again.



Happy International Women's Day!

Let's celebrate ourselves and each other—not just today, but every day. We are intelligent, creative, empathetic, and loving.



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Building Our Community Together

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WALKING THE SWEETGRASS ROAD

Kim Wheatley
Traditional Anishinaabe Grandmother

SWEET WATER REFLECTIONS

As we approach the oncoming season of spring, many of us will be engaged in a beloved winter activity called maple syrup harvesting. Some may head out to trails, and some may attend teaching spaces, but wherever you go, what you will meet is the ancient indigenous practice of harvesting from one of our most precious gifts of creation.

Ininaatig (The Standing Being), or the Sugar Maple as its known in English, is a magical tree in some ways. The gift of the sweet water which becomes some of the most treasured syrup in the world, and distinctly a prized Canadian export, has its roots firmly embedded within Indigenous ingenuity. The coveted maple syrup that is acquired through the gathering of sap is a gift that only occurs once a year.

This syrup finds a reason to make an appearance only when the wintery days begin to warm a little bit, but the nights are still frosty cold. It's a gift from the trees and Canada exports about 75% of the world's maple syrup.

Maple Syrup is multifunctional and the traditional Indigenous historical use of this gift is quite diverse. For example: it was used as a sweetening agent for otherwise unpleasant medicines and foods, was always an important trade item, also a healing agent, and the list goes on for its uses. This miracle liquid continues to thrill tastebuds locally, nationally and internationally.

The manner in which this gift was given from Creation is ancient and has been captured in many diverse origin stories. The stories centre around Nanaboozhoo's (Nanabush) adventures. He is the great superhero of the Anishinaabe Nations and was believed to be half-human and half-spirit which gave him great powers. This sacred being left many lessons for the original People of this great country to ruminate on. He is the one whose stories are told during the winter season and these stories continue to be handed down from generation to generation.

One of the ways I look at the sugaring time is with immense gratitude, mostly because it is still here, gifting us with its continued presence regardless of the hardships the Standing Beings (trees) are struggling to withstand. It is so very difficult to see the destruction of old growth forests and thousand-year-old trees cut down under the guise of resource extraction for an all-mighty dollar. The deep question needs to be asked – "For whose benefit"? Will our great-great-grandchildren experience the gifts of trees?

Anyone who knows me, knows I love trees! I talk to them, I hug them and

I thank them daily for their continued presence, sacrifice and resilience. I apologize to them for the terrible treatment they continue to endure. Science has proven that these are indeed beings who respond to hugs, love, care and companionship. They have an incredible communication system that is superior to our cell and house phones. This communication system resides in the roots and mycelium conductors. They operate at lightening speed communication all out of sight but, with extraordinary accuracy regardless of distances.

Science has demonstrated that the intelligence of trees allows the old ones to protect the younger generation in so many ways. For instance, during a drought the "old ones" will redirect water to the youngsters to encourage resilience and survival. During fires they warn their relatives of the coming devastation so resources can be pushed back into the earth. New technology has even captured some of the sounds this communication trail makes.

When it comes to human benefits the list of supports, help and food they provide is irreplaceable. We know they can cool us down on a hot day... it can be up to 10 degrees cooler in the shade of a tree. They have a higher oxygen level that makes us feel good around them. They feed and protect us. The smell of trees has been shown to directly improve depression with regular exposure. The sight of a tree is good medicine for blood pressure reduction. The benefits of trees are undeniable.

However, their living value is limited in our world today. So many cultures around the world celebrate their arrival, existence and sacrifices through ceremonies, songs, stories, poetry and artwork. We too can remember and celebrate the trees every day and not just during the holiday seasons or special ceremonies or because they can give us something. Their existence is one of the most magical gifts on the planet.

What can we learn from trees? Well, for starters, that resilience is a choice. That sacrifice can meet the needs of the greater good, that even

in the worst of times we can still hold each other up, that connections run deep and that's why knowing your roots matters.

It would be a massive change to the resource extraction economy in some ways to undertake a shift in value of these incredible beings, but could it be possible to look at a forest of trees and see their spirits instead of dollar figures? That would be a dream come true for someone like me and indeed many others.

We were deeply reminded of their incredible value during the COVID shutdown when city folks in particular began flooding parks and trails to sit and visit with nature.

Environmental complexities require a solid chain of relationships to be solidly in place. This means watching and learning from the expertise of the trees who are ancient beings of great wisdom.

They are part of a specific chain of creation with original instructions to take care of humans and animals. They are also required to take care of each other and so forests matter.

Each tree matters, diversity is something they are really good at managing. They are never an inconvenience, in my view. Cities tend to overlook the value of these incredible beings because the real estate they require doesn't pay taxes. The sight of trees in cities is delegated to small parkettes, occasional street and lawn ornaments, or as decorative seasonal guests.

I think it's about time that we see them as the lungs of the earth, as incredible air cleaners, as safe shelter for many of our nonhuman relatives, as beings worthy of protection, valued for their sheer presence, let alone the diverse gifts they bring to the world.

They should be given legal protection that allows them to thrive and survive.

I am a proud tree hugger and lover. This sweet relationship will never end for me as I hope it doesn't for more and more tree lovers.

This spring get to know a tree, give 'em a hug or two, and remember to thank them so they will continue to be here for generations to come.

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Eco Guardian aims to re-shore manufacturing locally with help from Province



MPP Dawn Gallagher Murphy was joined by the Eco Guardian team at their Addison Hall plant for Monday morning's funding announcement.

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Eco Guardian has been making paper-based products for more than 20 years and as they aim to have their Aurora plant up and running by the end of this month, they're also aiming to re-shore jobs here at home.

On Monday, Eco Guardian, which is located in the Addison Hall Business Park, welcomed Newmarket-Aurora MPP Dawn Gallagher Murphy to tour their new plant and celebrate a \$1.5 million Provincial grant to help the company bring manufacturing and jobs back to the community.

"This facility represents a major step forward, not only for Eco Guardian, but for the entire manufacturing sector right here in Newmarket-Aurora," said MPP Gallagher Murphy. "Eco Guardian has built a reputation for pushing boundaries, developing environmentally responsible, compostable packaging solutions using

repurposed natural by-products. With this new facility, equipped with advanced cutting-edge machinery...you are reshoring production from overseas and bringing manufacturing jobs right here to Ontario, and that is something worth celebrating."

The \$1.5 million grant for Eco Guardian comes from the Province's Advanced Manufacturing and Innovation Competitiveness (AMIC) stream and has contributed to the company's \$11 million overall investment in the Aurora community.

Once fully up and running, it's expected to create 42 new jobs and maintain 18 existing positions all while strengthening local supply chains by producing paper-based food packaging products, such as coffee cups, locally.

"Eco Guardian's decision to expand in Aurora reinforces what we already know: Ontario is the best place in Canada and one of the best places in the world to grow

a manufacturing business," said MPP Gallagher Murphy. "This investment is part of our government's broader work to strengthen Ontario's economy, protect our workers, and secure our supply chains. Programs like the regional development program, especially the AMIC stream, are helping businesses adopt advanced technologies, expand production, and stay competitive in a global market, all the while

creating good-paying local jobs.

"Eco Guardian's new facility is a perfect example of what happens when government and industry work together, because when we work together, we drive innovation, strengthen our communities, reduce environmental impact, and create real opportunities for workers and families. The AMIC stream is helping more firms with the financial support and tools that are needed to improve competitiveness while strengthening essential supply chains."

Expressing gratitude for the Province's investment was Anil Abrol, President and CEO of Eco Guardian.

The support "validates the belief in our vision" of "we'll bring Ontario to the world and the world to Ontario."

"This facility is my vision," he said. "I have grown up in the manufacturing environment and when I came here to Canada in 2004, having worked for many different entrepreneurs in the world, the vision was to have our own manufacturing so that we can create jobs, we can create some value, we can leave behind some legacy which people can follow, and that's what we're trying to do here. Ontario will be very proud one day when we see the largest food service manufacturers cups getting produced in this facility."

"I could not have done this without the support of my leadership team and the team working very, very hard day in and day out to make this facility happen."

Auroran photo by Brock Weir

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BUSINESS & FINANCE



Victoria Hall to receive new lease on life following approval of reno budget

From page 1

Ron Weese, Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner, and Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo – said more information was needed to make a decision, including the potential future use of the landmark on the southwest corner of Victoria and Mosley Streets.

“Council has not reviewed a public report demonstrating the return of investment at this new cost level. This fundamentally changes the financial reality of this project,” said Councillor Gallo. “Council has a duty to also ask whether this level of investment represents the best and most responsible use of public funds. We should seriously consider whether we should pause, reset and evaluate whether this project should proceed, whether its scope should be reconsidered, or whether these funds should be allocated more effectively to other priorities that deliver greater value for residents.”

Councillor Gallo questioned the timing of the proposed budget increase (See Page 10) and requested that the matter go into Closed Session discussions to receive “full and complete information, including specific details that cannot be discussed publicly” and ask the “necessary questions required to fulfil our fiduciary responsibility to the residents of Aurora before any final

decision was made.”

Councillor Weese had a similar point of view, stating the debate was “not about...preservation of heritage,” but rather the process that got Council to this point.

“We don’t have adequate information,” he said. “I just don’t want to be an accomplice on this by voting on behalf of this to make it move forward because we want to preserve the building. I think we need to look at the building and look at the use of the building for heritage purposes, and the renovation of this building should suit those purposes.”

“I don’t think there’s any emotion in this, at least there isn’t for me,” he continued later in the meeting. “If there is for other people, this is a sound decision that should be made on facts and we don’t have those facts. I don’t have those facts and I’m not going to be complicit with the lack of facts that are not provided in here and vote in favour of something that residents have explained they don’t want.... If somebody thinks this dry rot is worth \$1.67 million, I’m no builder, but this doesn’t make any sense to me. I’d like to see some facts. I’d like to see where they are and, if in another two or three weeks, or six weeks, whatever it takes, in order to be sound about what [decision]

we’re making, I’m ready to wait.”

Councillor Gaertner also urged a pause, adding that the project needs to be looked at “very clearly” and through the lens of how residents and visitors could enjoy the building.

“We have to preserve this building. It’s under the Ontario Heritage Trust, which does not dictate what we do with it, but we have to ensure that it stands,” she said. “It’s a beautiful building. This project was not in the 10-year Capital Repair and Replacement Reserve. It was not in our 10-year Capital Plan. That reserve fund is already substantially in deficit without adding a new project... and that’s very concerning to me and I think concerning to some of our taxpayers because the purpose of that fund is to manage long-term sustainability of our infrastructure and our buildings.

“I think when we are thinking about the residents and their tax dollars and what they want in that residential neighborhood, what are our goals and what are our responsibilities? To me, that is to preserve the heritage building, to celebrate the Gothic Revival architecture. I am not interested in changing the use, adding a use... [Neighbours are] already coping with the noise and light from the Town Square, from the Armoury. I think what we need to do is respect the heritage of this building and leave it at that. And I think if you would do a survey, an official survey of this area, you would find out that that’s what the residents would want.”

Proponents of the plan said they too had concerns about the rising costs, but argued that not only was improving Victoria Hall part of the overall revitalization plan for Aurora’s historic downtown, but the improvements on the table would have to be done regardless of the cost to make the building usable and accessible for the future.

“I, for one, believe that we have one of the most competent and professional staff in York Region,” said Councillor Kim. “Sure, there could have been ways to mitigate the shock value of the sticker price, likely, but I do believe that these figures given to us is essentially a figure that provides Council and the Town with the most flexibility to provide the [broadest] range of usage for this building. In the end, we’ve all heard there’s three options here – we either sell it, we renovate it, or demolish it. Demolishing it is not an option. Leaving it as is is not an option because we can’t do anything with it because it’s not safe to even go in. This \$2.1 million – is that a lot of money? It certainly is. My view of the funds is there’s a cash component of a financial ledger and there’s also an asset component. Whatever we put into this building, whether it’s \$500,000 or \$2.1 million, the value of our assets is still the same.”

As the debate continued, he added he felt needing more time to debate is a common refrain around the Council table on big projects, and it was time for action.

“I’d like to move the business of the Town and the vision for a greater Aurora where there is a great community benefit – not a small one, but a great community benefit,” he said. “We have to get over the initial sticker shock and move ahead to what the possibilities can be.”

This was a similar standpoint to the one voiced by Councillor Gilliland, who said the question ultimately came down to not whether to invest in the project, but “whether to do it strategically now or relatively later.”

“At the end of the day, I’m fundamentally just looking at the original point [and that is] to bring Victoria Hall to a standard that is compliant to our building codes, AODA (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities

Act) compliant, has safe electrical and has a building that will be legendary for the next 75 years,” she said. “This is a building we have refurbished a few times in its lifetimes by other Councils over the years. It’s not really a question of whether or not Victoria Hall requires an investment. It needs an investment....”

“I believe that’s what’s being presented from staff and what we’ve asked is minimally the structure that it needs in order to move forward to keep it... I think our hearts are all in the same place here, and I don’t think that there’s going to be an outcome that is really going to change today or two months from now.”

Councillor Thompson voiced a similar viewpoint. While he said he was not opposed to going into Closed Session for further information, he voiced skepticism on whether this information would lead to a different outcome as well. He stressed Victoria Hall was part of the original AECOM study carried out in 2016 that also looked at the repurposing of the Aurora Armoury and the old Library and Seniors’ Centre buildings on Victoria Street that were demolished to make way for the Aurora Town Square redevelopment, as well as future uses for Petch House.

“Today, I’m very proud that we made those decisions because, as a result, we have Town Square. We have a wonderful new addition. It’s been well-received from the community and it was a good choice, but a challenging one,” he said. “It took a long time to get there and part of that struggle was what was going to happen, and you had to get buy-in and Council to be able to agree on some degree of vision. The biggest step we had was the demolition of the Seniors’ Centre and the old Library because that really focused us then to move forward and say, ‘Okay, we’re no longer looking at repurposing. Let’s figure out the vision for this empty space.’ Still took some time, but we got there. Now we have a similar conversation where we have an underutilized asset that is just sitting there.

“We need to make a decision to go forward with this asset and how are we going to utilize it. I think from what I’ve heard around the table, everybody’s in agreement that we’re not looking to rebuild on this site. We want to utilize the current building in the best possible way.... Regardless of the use, whether it’s community space, whether it’s a commercial usage or some others, you know, these renovations still need to be done.

“The truth is that if we want to refurbish Victoria Hall, if we want to use it, whether it’s for public use or for commercial use, we need to do this, and we have the estimates.”

Mayor Mrakas also cited the AECOM report as one of the reasons he supported moving forward with the renovations to Victoria Hall.

“This is an investment in our community that we’ve been working towards – a goal of creating a vibrant downtown core and it’s another piece of the bigger puzzle of that revitalization,” he said. “We need to invest in our community...because if we don’t invest in our community, we can’t expect the private sector to invest in our community.... I think our community is one of the best places to live, work and play – and there’s a reason why we are here. It’s because we continue to invest in ourselves, in building something, in moving towards strengthening our community and our downtown core.

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Victoria Hall should remain a community space, say residents

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

The future use of Victoria Hall in the face of significant renovations has not yet been determined, but the venerable heritage building in Aurora's downtown core should remain as it has been for nearly 150 years: a place where residents can come together for a variety of reasons.

This was the message driven home to Council by residents last week as lawmakers debated the merits of the renovation plan.

Leta Dayfoot, who described herself as a "fly on the wall" at Council meetings, said "heritage was not just a building, but the history of the people within these buildings who were the foundation and the strength of the community of Aurora."

"The building (Victoria Hall) housed a church, a library, public health programs, a meeting place for local organizations and even a dance studio," she said. "Within the walls of Victoria Hall, the people of the community were provided with the space for spiritual growth, for education, for medical needs, and social networking, just to name a few. From my view, I see this as the legacy of Victoria Hall."

"Why can't this be Victoria Hall's legacy for today – a hub for the social needs of today's community? For example, a meeting place for youth to do homework, to listen to music, for programs like Out of the Cold, or community breakfasts provided by local churches or historical collections of different genres, for social clubs, etc. I have heard Victoria Hall is in much need of repairs to make it useful and safe for the community once again."

"I have heard that \$500,000 to \$800,000 would cover the cost to rebuild Victoria Hall to a point that would preserve the structure to the point of reclaiming its legacy in a hub of community needs. I understand that the project to refurbish the Victoria Hall

has ballooned to over \$2 million, which is available and can be accommodated from the facility asset management and growth and new reserves. This is a big chunk of money. It could be going towards many other heritage buildings and projects within this Town. Isn't that just common sense?"

Also advocating for community use Town Park-area resident Linda Durringer, who said renovations and future use must take into account the impact on existing residents.

"I would appreciate clarification on: the full scope of the proposed renovations; the intended long use term of the space; anticipated impacts such as noise traffic, parking servicing requirements, garbage storage, lighting and operating hours," she said. "Will there be further opportunities for public input? I have reviewed the 2016 AECON repurpose study, which outlined renovations estimated at approximately \$600,000, including an accessible ramp, washroom, electrical updates, all reasonable and community focused improvements. Why was there no action taken on this report?"

"Residents deserve a clear explanation of why costs have risen so substantially and whether the scope of the work has changed accordingly," she continued. "Even if these renovations proceed, it is difficult to see how taxpayers would reasonably recoup an investment of approximately \$2.2 million through rental revenue within any foreseeable timeframe. Victoria Hall sits in an established residential neighborhood. Transparency and proactive communication are essential to assuring that the quality of life of surrounding residents is thoroughly considered. As a community, we own this property. Why must the Town become a landlord? Why can this not remain a vibrant, public space, a meeting space, a rentable venue for weddings, reception, AGMs, celebrations of life and community gatherings?"

The building in question, she

maintained, should not go in the direction of the Aurora Armoury, now home to the restaurant Slabtown Armoury.

"Victoria Hall is designated heritage building. Preservation, not commercialization should be our goal. We do not need another beautiful heritage building altered with a modern glass atrium or by illuminated sign shining into the night. We have already seen that within our downtown heritage district on Yonge Street. Victoria Hall is a beautiful reminder of Aurora's past. Since 1883, the men and women who passed through these doors helped shape this Town into the community we are proud of today. To be surrounded by buildings with such history is an honour. With plans to revitalize our downtown core and preserve its historic buildings and facades, we must remain focused on protecting what is historic rather than modernizing it beyond

recognition."

Resident Shawn Deane was also among the residents objecting to the price tag before Council.

He also questioned the need for the addition on the back of Victoria Hall to be replaced to increase accessibility, when \$20,000 had previously been approved for a ramp.

John Hartman, a member of Aurora's Committee of Adjustment, also looked closer at the figures.

"Council gave approval to the Mayor's Budget on December 7, 2025. \$500,000 might have been approved at that time, but now jumped to a \$2.2 million factor. \$2 million for what? Don't get me wrong, I'm 100 per cent behind the preservation, protection, and required renovations of heritage assets within the Town, but why the bump?" he asked. "The word 'transparency' is defined by Webster's as the quality of being

Continued on page 22



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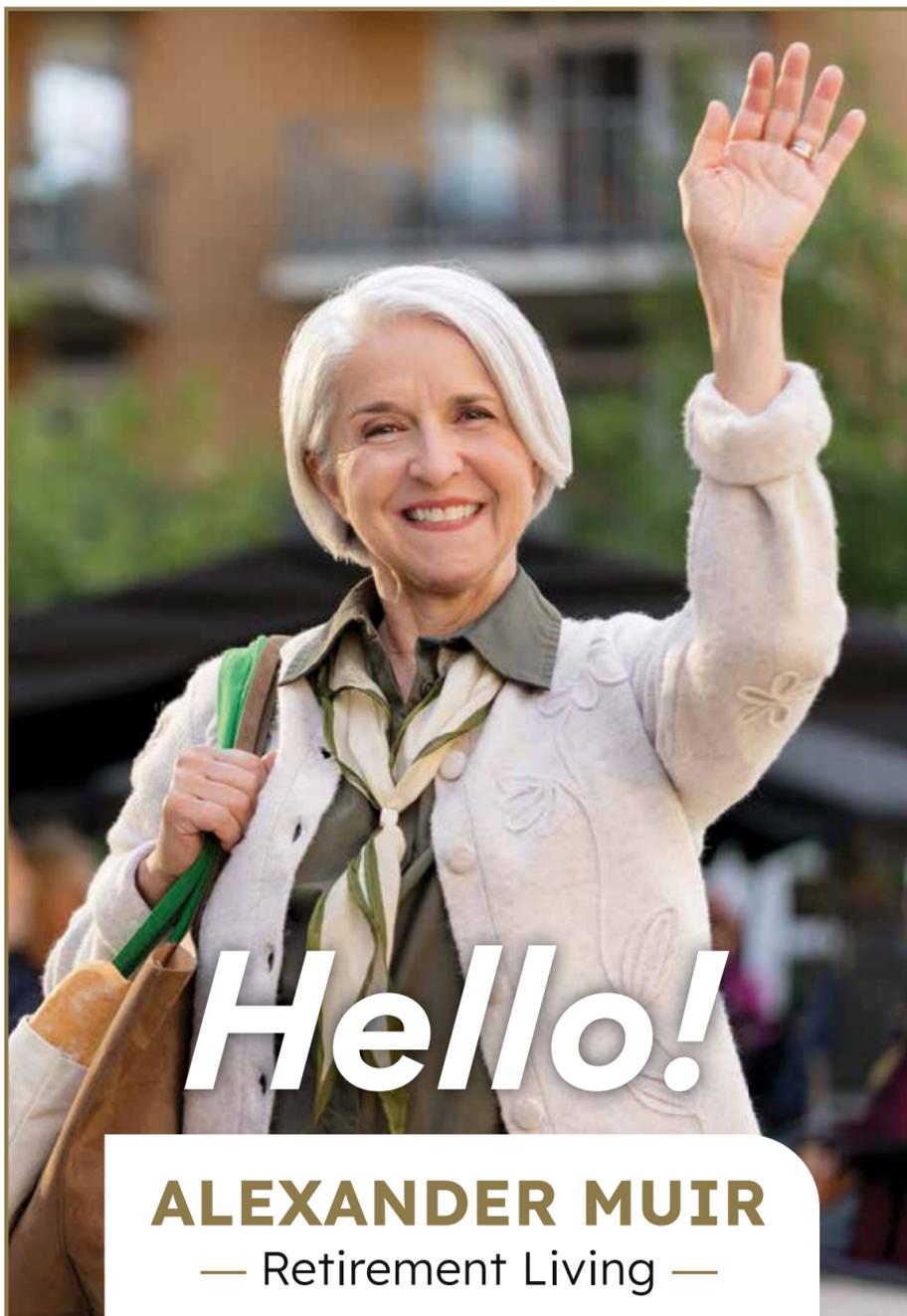
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Councillor raises concerns over process, transparency in Victoria Hall debate

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo has raised concerns regarding transparency and process in the discussions that led to Council's approval of a plan to renovate historic Victoria Hall.

The Councillor has sharply criticized the rising cost of the project, which, following Council approval last week, now stands at \$2.2 million, well beyond the \$500,000 previously budgeted.

While Councillor Gallo says the ballooning price tag raises "serious transparency and process concerns," those who voted for the project argued the previously-approved \$500,000 was merely a placeholder within the budget.

"This was not a transparent or responsible process," said Councillor Gallo in a statement following last week's Council meeting. "Council was asked to approve a multi-million dollar increase without having been provided critical structural reports when they were

completed and without those costs being reflected in the capital budget when it was adopted."

The Councillor argued the engineering and structural findings were completed in May of 2025, but Council was not provided that update in real time.

"This means Council did not have access to material information affecting millions of dollars in public spending when it was first known," he said. "That undermines Council's ability to fulfil its fiduciary responsibility to taxpayers."

"My vote against this increase was not about opposing the preservation of Victoria Hall," he said. "It was about ensuring proper process, transparency, and financial accountability."

"When a project increases from \$500,000 to over \$2 million, Council and the public deserve clear answers, full disclosure, and adequate time to review the implications. Residents expect their elected officials to exercise careful oversight when significant public funds are involved. That requires timely

disclosure, open discussion, and a process that ensures Council has the information needed to make informed decisions."

Councillor Gallo's statement reflects comments made during the February 24 Council meeting.

There, he said it was a question of "leadership" on Council, particularly ensuring each elected member "has all the necessary information and adequate time to review and discuss it."

"Given the clear gaps in disclosure, the timing of the structural findings, the existence of reports Council did not receive until recently and the financial magnitude of this decision, it is appropriate that this matter be referred to Closed Session so that Council can receive full and complete information, including specific details that cannot be discussed publicly, and ask the necessary questions required to fulfil our fiduciary responsibility to the residents of Aurora before any financial decision is made."

Supporting Councillor Gallo's concerns were Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese who said the decision made last week was "not about heritage or preservation of heritage" but rather about "process." Similarly, Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner said it was "alarming" how the recommendations came before Council.

"It's not the way I want to be responsible to the taxpayers, so I definitely think this needs to go into Closed Session and I'd like to know how this process happened or lack of process happened," she said.

Municipal CAO Doug Nadorozny told Council that the process was a "difficult one" to quickly summarize as the process has been ongoing since a "superficial" 2016 review. The estimate of \$500,000, he said, went back to that point.

"Since then, and this isn't by any means a comprehensive review of all the steps, but the major points that bring us to today, Council will recall we were given direction as staff to consider a possible alternate use for that building. It wasn't approved. It was suggested that we go back and do some more work with someone that had responded to the request for proposals," said Nadorozny of where the process stands now.

"From that point on, we were trying to figure out what's the best way to get this packaged up and bring it back to Council for potentially an alternate use. As we contemplated that work, two things that we felt we were lacking information for a comprehensive review: one was really what lurked underneath that floor. The original consultant in 2016 did not do a survey of the conditions underneath. The floor seemed fine. There was nothing obvious from a visual perspective that the floor was about to give way or anything like that, so it wasn't part of their 2016 assessment. We also discovered that before we could go to a tender or to get any kind of detailed work, we also needed a designated substance review, which is a common part of a big project like that to see, especially for a building that old, is there lead, is there asbestos, is there other things that would complicate a renovation? That level of detail was never done 10 years ago. That was all done as part of potentially bringing back to Council an alternate use that we had shared with Council previously."

The dry rot, he added, was brought up in May and staff had the consultant to

"go back and do a more detailed review" of Victoria Hall.

"We identified those areas where we needed some more information, and they are the ones that determined the situation with the dry rot and also the structure of the floor itself, being a floor built on top of a floor. That resulted in there not being an easy fix to that," said Nadorozny. "When we got into a complete reconstruction of the floors, tearing everything down to that level, we decided that it made sense to do a more holistic approach to give Council the full spectrum of what could be done with that site when if you're going to consider that kind of a restoration. It's on that basis that the revised quote was brought forward."

Council was ultimately split 4 – 3 on whether to forge ahead with the next steps in the renovations rather than pausing for further information.

Prior to the vote, Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland said she believed all the relevant information she needed to make a decision was before Council. Ward 4 Councillor Michael Thompson said he was "happy to support" Councillor Gallo's request for further discussion "about how we got there, how the reports came about, the lack of information, to have more transparency," but said it was important to "move forward."

"I think it's important that we move forward with this and continue on this path for the development of Town Square and supporting the renovation of the existing facility, the asset, Victoria Hall, so that we can move forward with some of the things that we've talked about in terms of future uses and...complementing what is available to the public downtown."

Mayor Tom Mrakas, at the end of the debate, contended that "every single member at this table had the exact same information" and the same opportunities to pose their questions to staff.

"This is an investment in our community that we have been working towards: a goal of creating a vibrant downtown core, and it's another piece of that bigger puzzle of that revitalization," he said, adding the previously budgeted \$500,000 was a placeholder figure. "I'll just remind everyone sitting at this table, we have a placeholder for an aquatic center. Does everyone at the table remember what that placeholder was? \$22 million. Does anyone at this table think that we would have built an aquatic center for \$22 million? It would probably be closer to \$100 million to build that facility. We need to create a budget, put it in as a placeholder, to allow staff to have the ability and the funds to move forward and bring us Class D estimates to start to do the initial work. Because without any funds whatsoever, they can't move forward. Without any direction from this table, they can't move forward on doing a detailed analysis."

Since the meeting Councillor Gallo says he's been heartened by the feedback he's received from residents, and contended the vast majority of the information in front of Council in closed session should be made public.

"Most people, the vast majority, are disappointed on a bunch of levels – the increase in budget, the fact that we're spending that much money on it, and the lack of transparency are probably the two biggest things," he says.



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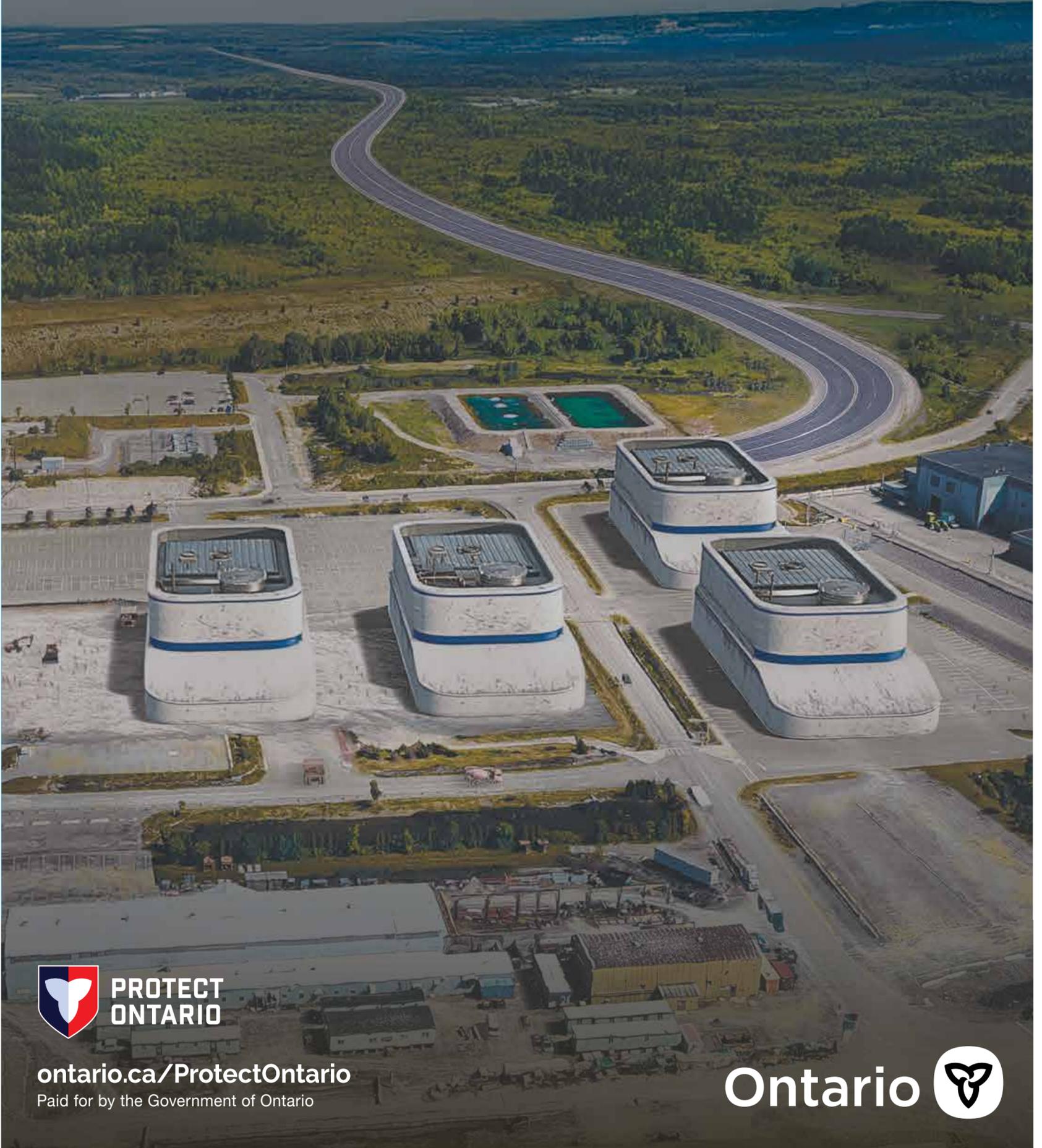
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Revived Aurora Winter Blues Festival looks to 2027 and building on legacy

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Winter Blues were received warmly over the weekend as the Aurora Cultural Centre brought the Aurora Winter Blues Festival back to the community.

The four-day festival, hosted by the Centre in conjunction with Music Aurora, was the first since the long-running event was put on ice due to the Global Pandemic, and organizers hit the ground running with a packed program in 2026, many of which were sell-out events.

The Festival (AWBF) kicked off

on Thursday, February 26, with a welcoming reception followed by a performance by Jack De Keyzer. Other artists taking over the Aurora Town Square Performance Hall included Suzie Vinnick with special guests Kevin Breit, Tony D., and Jay Blues, Glenn Marais' Jook, Dominique Fils-Aime, Harrison Kennedy with Dave Mowat, and Little Magic Sam Band.

Educational workshops were also hosted by the Centre throughout the weekend with Early Instruments of Blues, led by Glenn Marais and Manny DeGrandis; a String Bending session with Suzie Vinnick, Tony D., and Jay Blues; Banjo Man Blues

with Michelle Johnson of the Aurora Museum & Archives and historian Diana Braithwaite; and a Blues Harp Workshop with Little Magic Sam and Dave Mowat, led by local musician Steve Falk.

"It's a very special journey for the Blues in Aurora, starting from a conversation with Music Aurora many years ago to include some Blues in our programs," said Suzanne Haines, Executive Director of the Aurora Cultural Centre at Thursday's reception, referencing the organization that led the AWBF for nearly a decade before the pandemic break. "The conversation continues to build to the revival that we're seeing today – this music that's beloved by the community in a new relationship between Music Aurora and the Aurora Cultural Centre."

This relationship, she said, includes furthering Music Aurora's efforts to support up-and-coming artists through their scholarship fund, which was supported on Thursday evening through live and silent auctions.

"Over the years, we've raised a significant amount of money for Blue Door Shelters and CHATS (Community and Home Assistance to Seniors) and most recently for our Youth in Music scholarship program," said Music Aurora President Greg Smith. "We also [get] youth paid gigs to get some exposure and some opportunity on stage. We try to give the youth of this Town opportunities when we can."

"What's different about AWBF versus many other music festivals? Community is first and foremost. It's about community giving back, having them participate.... We had a hiatus.

COVID made it a little challenging for us, but we're so glad to have this partnership with the Aurora Cultural Centre and we look forward to a long, prosperous relationship working with them and the community on this."

Also on hand for Thursday night's kick-off celebration were Newmarket-Aurora MPP Dawn Gallagher Murphy, Mayor Tom Mrakas, and members of Council. In his remarks, Mayor Mrakas highlighted the community spirit of the AWBF as well.

"I couldn't be happier that this incredible event is back on our calendar after a five-year hiatus, because events like this don't just fill a room with music, they fill a community with energy, connection, and shared experience," said Mayor Mrakas. "I want to thank Suzanne and the entire team at the Aurora Cultural Centre, as well as... Jamie, Greg, Stuart and the entire Music Aurora team for joining forces to bring back the Aurora Blues Festival, but for the incredible work that you do year-round fostering the music scene here in the Town of Aurora."

"Tonight, as we celebrate the revival of the Aurora Winter Blues Festival, let it be a powerful reminder of what's possible when community vision, partnership, and creativity come together. I couldn't be prouder of what this represents for Aurora. We also know that events like this inspire the next generation of artists and that inspiration must be matched with opportunity. That's why I want to thank everyone for their generous support tonight of Music Aurora's scholarship program, helping young musicians pursue their passion and share their talent with the world."

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Winter Blues heat up Aurora Cultural Centre



The new edition of the Aurora Winter Blues Festival (AWBF) was a resounding success for the Aurora Cultural Centre and a point of pride for Music Aurora, which spearheaded the festival prior to the global pandemic. (Top Row) AWBF founders Jamie and Helen Macdonald are pictured here with Music Aurora's Greg Smith. Suzanne Haines, Executive Director of the Aurora Cultural Centre, welcomed guests. The Cultural Centre's Derek Andrews is pictured before the sold-out crowd. (Middle Row) Among the performers were Glenn Marais, Dominique Fils-Aime, (Third Row) Dave Mowat, Harrison Kennedy, and the Little Magic Sam Band.

Auroran photos by Glenn Rodger

Next exit: Making the meeting



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Art from the Heart connects caregivers and loved ones through creativity

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

The onset of cognitive challenges can lead to a shift in dynamics between those receiving a diagnosis and the loved ones caring for them, but a new art therapy program coming to Aurora aims to forge connections between families through the healing power of creativity.

Beginning March 10, and running on each Tuesday through April 28, Memory Lane Home Living will bring their Art from the Heart program to the Aurora Public Library.

A hands-on program where participants – caregivers and loved ones alike – can explore activities, creativity, and connections with other families on the same journey, Art from the Heart is a free program made possible through the financial support of the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

“Having this funding helped us bring this program into the community and we’re starting with Aurora,” says Nayeli Peña Mora, a recreational therapist with Memory Lane Home Living. “Our Art from the Heart program is designed for

caregivers and their loved ones to help them connect through art and community connection. We’re hoping to target all the domains of wellbeing – environmental, social, intellectual, and spiritual.... We know there’s a shortage of programs that support both the caregiver and their loved ones in the York Region community, so we are trying to reach the people that are aging in place and we need to create an infrastructure of programs for this purpose.

“95 per cent of seniors do not want to go into long-term care, according to Seniors for Social Action, and we know that Canada’s oldest population, the Baby Boomers, are now turning 80 in 2026, and this is called the ‘Silver Tsunami.’ The population of seniors 65+ is projected to also swell to nearly one-quarter of the overall population by 2040, as quoted by the Government of Canada, and this Silver Tsunami will have huge pressures on housing and healthcare for seniors, so we want to help keep seniors as healthy as possible, and it starts with day programs and community programs such as ours.”

Being able to work with the Aurora Public Library (APL), she adds, “is amazing”

and they are collaborating with APL on Cognitive Care Kits to support caregivers and their loved ones in the community even further.

Each session of Art from the Heart will be led by an art therapist who will have a unique program every Tuesday.

Caregivers and their loved ones will be invited to sit together and work with other participants to create “a meaningful piece of art that allows them to express the grief that they might be going through with this new diagnosis, or to help them identify with the new identity they have,” Peña Mora explains.

“We are hoping to have them not only connect with each other – the caregiver and their loved one – but to connect with other families who may be going through the same changes. We have seen the benefits of having a community connection program that includes caregivers and their loved ones. We see through [our Music from the Heart program] how they take this time to meaningfully be present together and connect through the creative arts as a form of expression and we’re hoping to do the same thing with the art program.

“We know with this diagnosis sometimes the roles change between the caregiver and their loved ones; therefore, we want to offer an opportunity for them to connect together, rather than just having them be dropped off (at a day program). It will give them an opportunity to perhaps learn about their new identity, learn more about what they’re going through to grieve together, and also to grieve with other people who may be going through the same experience.”

Memory Lane’s Mona Lancaster adds that “healing doesn’t happen in isolation” and its essential for all the players to know there are other people who understand them.

“What I love through Ontario Trillium is

they give you a chance to pilot (a program) and see if it works, and then, from there, we would figure out additional funding based on the success of the program,” says Lancaster. “That has been a gift for us to see how the community responds to it.... We’ll find out how to improve it and what we could take away each time.

“We understand that when you first come out with a diagnosis, there is a bit of grief in processing it and there’s also heart. Sometimes I see in caregivers and their loved ones that communication is challenging, so it is a nice place to be with other people and not feel like you’re being judged. You’re all in there for the same reason. The quality of the artwork is not what we’re looking at. We’re looking at what comes from it.”

Peña Mora adds that by hosting an art exhibition at the end of the program, they hope participants will be able to forge further community connections and create a larger support network.

“We’re hoping to bring awareness about this diagnosis and perhaps have them connect with the community to allow other people in the community who may not know about it know there are people experiencing cognitive changes and to help support them as much as possible, to learn how to support them, as well as show that they are still feeling individuals able to create art and do different things that stray away from having that stigma of losing their memory and [the thought] they can’t do anything,” she says. “That’s not true. They can do more than what people expect of them and they are still able to create and make beautiful art, whether it is through music therapy, eco-therapy, or art therapy, they are still able to bring value to the community.”

For more on the upcoming program, visit memorylanehomeliving.ca or call 905-237-1419.

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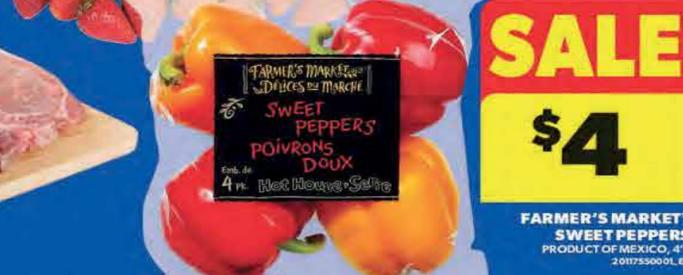
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For Lindsay, community is the fabric of her daily life. As an Aurora mom of three, whose family regularly enjoys local programs, she understands firsthand what makes a neighborhood feel like home. This gratitude drives her to give back to the initiatives that enrich her own family's life.

Lindsay's commitment is most evident in her "boots-on-the-ground" philanthropy. A portion of every commission supports the Royal LePage Shelter Foundation—a mission she took global last October. During the challenging RLP Cambodia Trek, Lindsay raised over \$20,000 for Sandgate Women's Shelter.

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Alexis Ciancio, ClubWell

ALEXIS CIANCIO IS THE CO-FOUNDER OF CLUBWELL — a women-only space in King City built with one clear intention: creating a place where women can prioritize themselves in a way that feels elevated, supportive, and deeply community-driven.

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Alexis is hands-on in every part of the business, from vision and strategy to branding and client experience. But she credits ClubWell's growth to her incredible team of instructors, practitioners, and front-of-house leaders who care deeply about the women they serve.

As the brand approaches its third year — with a major renovation underway — Alexis and her team are excited to welcome new faces. ClubWell is currently accepting new members and inviting women to experience the space for themselves.



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Brittney Megann is the CEO & Head Socialista of Socials & Stiletto's, a creative marketing agency based in Aurora helping female founders elevate their business and build an iconic brand through social media, marketing, and PR.

With over a decade of experience as a marketing strategist, Brittney is known for her signature approach to "magnetic marketing", blending strategy with bold storytelling to help beauty, fashion, and lifestyle brands stand out.

What began as a passion for social media has grown into a thriving full-service agency serving clients across Canada and the United States. In 2025, she opened the Socials & Stiletto's headquarters in Aurora and launched The Content Lab, an in-house studio designed to help small business owners create elevated content with confidence.

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Heavily involved in philanthropy, Tatiana supports people in need through donations to **food banks, Yellow Brick House, Sandgate Women's Shelter**, and other organizations, as well as through sponsorships and volunteer work. She enjoys living in Aurora, where she is a devoted wife and proud mother of two grown children.

Building long-term relationships is at the heart of Tatiana's business. With her passion and expertise, she consistently finds the perfect match for buyers, sellers, and investors. Her guiding principle, "Helping You Is What I Do," reflects her commitment to client satisfaction, which remains her ultimate goal.

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Helen understands that real estate decisions can be both exciting and stressful. She is highly accessible, maintains open and ongoing communication, and guides her clients seamlessly from start to finish to ensure a smooth and worry-free experience.

For the past five years, Helen has proudly partnered with her son, Paul, combining experience with a fresh perspective to deliver exceptional service to their community.

Outside of real estate, Helen enjoys spending time with her family and giving back as a volunteer Registrar for the Aurora Minor Hockey Association.

It would be my pleasure and honour to work with you.



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ROSA CALABRESE Curator | Gallerist | Community Advocate

As an accomplished curator and founder of the Royal Rose Gallery located in the heart of downtown Aurora ON, Rosa Calabrese has dedicated her career to celebrating artistic excellence and nurturing cultural dialogue within her community. With years of experience in the art world, including managing a gallery for artist Won Lee (a celebrated Korean-Canadian sculptor) to an educator at McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Rosa has curated numerous successful exhibitions and championed emerging and established artists alike. Her commitment to fostering creativity has positioned her as a respected voice in the local art scene.

Driven by a profound belief that art can educate, engage and empower, Rosa's work is fueled by her passion to make art accessible and meaningful to all. She finds joy in creating spaces where artists and audiences come together to share stories, spark conversations, and cultivate deeper understanding.

Among her proudest accomplishments is the successful establishment of the Royal Rose Gallery as a vibrant cultural hub, the creation of innovative community programs, and her mentorship of young curators and artists. Having the opportunity to host two Canadian Prime Ministers and exhibiting immigrant artists, Rosa's efforts have not only brought diverse voices to the forefront but also strengthened community bonds through art.

Looking ahead, Rosa aims to expand the gallery's reach through traveling exhibitions, educational workshops, and cross-cultural collaborations. Her vision includes fostering greater inclusivity in the arts and continuing to support underrepresented artists in gaining the recognition they deserve.



A Legacy of Empowerment & COMMUNITY

Co-owning Omar's Shoes, a family business since 1970, I've dedicated my life to building community connections, supporting local businesses, and empowering women entrepreneurs. Growing up under apartheid in South Africa instilled in me a deep commitment to equality, especially for children. Now, as a Canadian, I'm proud to contribute to this country's vibrant business landscape.

For six years, I've served on Aurora's Economic Development Board, promoting sustainable local growth. Volunteering has always been my way of giving back, from painting faces at the Terry Fox Run to roles on the Youth Justice Committee, as a cultural coordinator, and supporting the Stephen Lewis Foundation. I've also coached youth soccer and sought ways to uplift others.

Family is central to my life, from cherishing moments with my husband, children, and granddaughter to running a business rooted in integrity. I'm especially proud of my two daughters, strong leaders who embody resilience and determination.

On International Women's Day, I celebrate the strength of women in business, our power to inspire, and my commitment to helping others succeed. Last year, while celebrating our 55th anniversary, we raised \$70,000 for Southlake Health Foundation's Men's Health initiative.

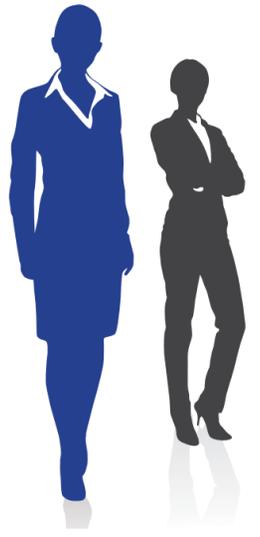
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Happy International Women's Day

In celebration of International Women's Day, we proudly recognize the leadership of the amazing staff at the Aurora Chamber of Commerce, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to supporting and strengthening local businesses.

Under the guidance of Executive Director Alison Mumford, alongside Sandra Watson, Events Manager, and Shayla Lockhurst, Manager of Member Relations, the Aurora Chamber of Commerce plays a vital role in connecting entrepreneurs, advocating for business success, and fostering economic growth. Together, this dynamic leadership team champions collaboration, innovation, and opportunity to empower Aurora's business community and showcase the meaningful impact of women's leadership at the heart of local prosperity.



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With over 25 years of experience and the honor of receiving multiple awards, including the President's Gold Award, Raffaella Dhingra has built a reputation for excellence, integrity, and results across York Region and the GTA. She understands that buying or selling a home is more than just a transaction—it's a significant life decision.

Specializing in residential sales, Raffaella combines in-depth market knowledge, strategic pricing, and innovative marketing to ensure her clients achieve the best possible outcomes. Whether it's helping first-time buyers find the perfect place to call home or assisting homeowners in maximizing their investment, she provides clear guidance, honest advice, and unwavering support every step of the way.

Her expertise also extends to the leasing and sale of commercial and industrial properties, offering her clients a comprehensive perspective on the real estate market. Known for building lasting relationships based on trust and communication, Raffaella is dedicated to delivering a smooth, stress-free experience while consistently exceeding expectations.

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Compassionate Leader in Homecare

Michelle Frauley founded **Hospall Homecare** with a clear belief: families deserve care they can trust. What began as a commitment to compassionate, relationship-based support has grown into an award-recognized, Accreditation Canada-designated organization serving families across York Region and select Toronto communities.

With more than 30 years of experience in community healthcare, Michelle has built Hospall on a foundation of clinical excellence, integrity, and heart. Her leadership blends high standards with deep empathy, recognizing the uncertainty families face when navigating aging, illness, and change.

Under her guidance, Hospall has fostered a culture where caregivers feel valued, innovation is embraced, and every client is treated with dignity and respect. For many families, Hospall becomes a source of comfort and calm — walking beside them through difficult decisions, tender moments, and life's most vulnerable transitions.

Michelle believes leadership is rooted in service: listening first, acting with integrity, and building partnerships that strengthen the entire community.

This International Women's Day, we celebrate women who are not only leading organizations but shaping a more compassionate future for families across our region.



Guiding Your Financial Future with Clarity & Care

As a mom of three, Jennifer knows how quickly life—and financial priorities—can change. Her focus is simple: feel comfortable and confident about your financial plan. Whether sitting one-on-one or leading a workshop, she has a natural ability to take complex topics and turn them into clear, practical conversations.

Recently earning her EPC (Elder Planning Counsellor) designation, Jennifer is passionate about navigating the opportunities—and challenges—that come with aging. Financial planning isn't about numbers on a page; it's about clarity, support, and preparation so you are free to focus on what matters most in your life.



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WEEK OF MARCH 5, 2026

Hodgins makes 86 saves in Junior Tigers' two-game home-and-home sweep of Buzzers

Tigers win five of eight under new Head Coach James Thomson to complete their '25-26 OJHL season

BY JIM STEWART

The Aurora Tigers continued their late-season burst of success by shutting out playoff-bound St. Michael's 3-0 on Sunday afternoon in Toronto and edging the Buzzers 4-3 on Saturday night in front of 300 fans at the ACC.

Tigers' netminder Kian Hodgins earned First Star of the Game honors on Sunday by stopping all 41 shots fired on net by the Buzzers. Hodgins was sensational on

Saturday as well—repelling 45 of 48 shots he faced in Aurora.

The Tigers' Grand Finale featured a poignant fifteen-minute pre-game ceremony.

The centre ice presentations—presided over by Mayor Tom Mrakas, Tigers Head Coach and General Manager James Thomson, and long-time Tigers Assistant Coach Dave Goverde—honored the billet families who cared for five out-of-town Tigers players this season; recognized the recent passing of legendary Tigers Public Address Announcer Gene Gallant whose booming voice provided gravitas for the club's two national championships in 2004 and 2007; and applauded the career of



Tigers' goalie Kian Hodgins is mobbed by teammates after his 46-save performance preserved a 4-3 win over St. Michael's to close out the regular season. **Auroran photo by Jim Stewart**

Tigers Assistant Captain Avery Grant who was joined on-ice by his extended family.

Grant—described as “a fearless defender” during the pre-game ceremony—was moved by the recognition.

“It was definitely an amazing feeling. I didn't know how many of my family were going to attend. When they just kept coming along the red carpet to centre ice, it showed how much support I've received from them.”

The veteran defender described what it's meant to him to be a Tiger.

“It's been everything. My grandparents lived in Aurora when I was growing up. We'd come and visit them and go to Tigers games as kids. Playing here has been special for me, especially with the recent passing of my grandmother.”

In a game filled with sentiment for Grant, the team leader on and off the ice described the key to the one-goal victory over the Buzzers: “Sticking to our new structures that [Head Coach] James [Thomson] has put in place. Our clear breakouts tonight were the result of lots of practice time spent on clearing our own zone. We've adapted well and played our best hockey over the last three weeks.”

One of the keys to the Tigers' improved fortunes in February—during which they have won five of eight games on Head Coach Thomson's watch—has been excellent goaltending and Grant praised the 45-save performance of Hodgins versus the Buzzers on Saturday night.

“Kian's been great. We're the oldest guys on the team. He's very vocal back there and he's always talking to us. He helps the defensemen.”

Both Hodgins and Grant were called upon many times during the chippy contest to serve as effective penalty killers. The exhausted Tiger defenseman expressed his satisfaction at being called upon to defend power plays and repel the Buzzers at the end of the game when the visitors were pushing hard for the equalizer.

“I definitely feel honored to be trusted so much to be on the ice during the critical parts of the game. Since I'm not a big offensive player, killing penalties is something I take pride in. I'm glad the coaching staff has faith in me to do the right thing. I was happy we could stop

them at the end and to win my final game as a Tiger.”

The only power play goal that Grant's PK squad gave up was nine minutes into the first period with Tigers defender Martin Maryanovski in the sin bin for holding. Buzzers forward Julian Campoli buried a rebound off Caiden Clair's blast from the left point, tucking the puck between the pads of Hodgins to stake the navy blue-clad visitors to a 1-0 lead.

Hodgins turned aside 18 of the 19 shots he faced in the first period and his excellence between the pipes created time for the Tigers' offence to recalibrate.

With 4:22 remaining in the opening frame, Charlie Hotles took a pass from Sebastian Catalano, spun, and sniped a snapshot past Buzzers' netminder Jonathan Frattaroli high glove side to pull the home side even.

Thirty seconds later, speedy centre Gianfranco Rosella fired a laser wrist shot from the right faceoff circle which was redirected by Catalano and—presto—the Tigers had their first lead of the game.

The Tigers added to their lead early in the second period. 1:30 into the middle frame, Johnathan Cirone fired a shot from between circles that knuckled and fooled Frattaroli—putting the home side up 3-1.

Thirteen minutes later, the free-flowing Tigers' power play struck when Anrijs Bundzenieks corralled Cirone's pass, used his big frame to create space between the circles, and snapped a shot past Frattaroli to give Aurora a three-goal lead.

Unfortunately, a defensive lapse late in the second period by the Tigers allowed Julian Mandarino to cut in off the left wing and the speedy forward roofed one—popping Hodgins's water bottle skyward—with 4.2 seconds on the clock to pull the visitors to within two goals.

The visitors were coming off a come-from-behind OT win in Caledon on Thursday night—rallying from a 5-2 deficit to win 6-5 versus the Admirals—and the seventh-place Buzzers seemed ready to replicate the feat.

However, the young Tigers forestalled the Buzzers' second consecutive comeback for the most of the third period—clinging to their hard-fought two-goal lead.

Continued on page 21

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Martone, Pak, Lewington, Van Berkel, and Hicks lead Junior Panthers to 4-0 win over Toronto Aeros



Junior Panther goal-scorers Abby Pak (13), Audrey Martone (90), Annabella Van Berkel (12), and Ellie Lewington (77) flank their goaltender Claire Hicks (30) who shut out the Toronto Aeros 4 - 0 on Saturday afternoon at the SARC.

Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger

BY JIM STEWART

Audrey Martone, Abby Pak, Ellie Lewington, and Annabella Van Berkel scored one goal each to lead the Central York Panthers to a tidy 4-0 win over the Toronto Aeros on Saturday afternoon at SARC.

It was the Panthers' third consecutive win.

Claire Hicks, who made many sensational saves to earn her first shutout of the season, described the importance of the Junior Panthers' victory with three regular season games left: "It's all about preparing for the playoffs right now. Our coaches have told us that we have to play every game like it's a playoff game."

When Hicks was asked if the Panthers had rebounded from their five-game slump with three consecutive wins, she concurred: "100%. Part of this game is that all teams go through the ups and downs during a long season. We're in a good position for the playoffs and winning games like this one today is a plus for us."

The steady keeper described the team win and her 22-save shutout: "It's a good feeling. Our entire team is pushing hard. It's an awesome group of girls—they played so well in front of me."

After a scoreless first period, Hicks flashed the leather at 16:17 and bailed out the Panthers' power play when she prevented a shortie on a clearcut breakaway four minutes later. Hicks' big saves in the middle frame kept the white-jerseyed visitors from scoring first.

With nine minutes left in the middle frame, Martone made a marvelous move off the right wing to get past two defenders and another clever deke to pull Aeros goaltender Samantha Besner side-to-side to deposit the disc into the lower right corner of the net.

The Panthers' second-leading scorer described her 15th of the season: "It all started with our good effort in the

D-Zone. We were able to get it out of our end and when I brought it into their zone, I saw that she stayed back in her net. I saw that she flinched on the deke so I could slide it in."

Martone, whose two-point performance led the team's offense, described the importance of the win over the Aeros: "We haven't been winning a lot lately, but we've put it all behind us. I thought we battled today. We worked as a team."

Seconds after Martone's go-ahead goal, Hicks bailed out her defensive corps again by repelling a dangerous 2-on-1 by the Aeros—kicking out her left pad to stop the doorstep one-timer.

The Panthers' netminder came up big again with 17 seconds left in a home side PK with a quick glove save to keep the Aeros off the scoreboard.

Buoyed by Hicks' heroics, Pak stole the puck at centre ice on an ensuing rush with the teams playing 4-on-4. The speedy centre took advantage of the extra space and time, barreled in from the right wing, deked Besner, and chipped it into the open net. Pak's brilliant unassisted goal was her 10th of the season and gave the Panthers a two-goal cushion with 3:16 remaining before second intermission.

Seven minutes into the third period, the Panthers pulled ahead 3-0.

Ellie Lewington delivered the knockout punch when she corralled a pass from Ella Frasca, burst in off the left wing, created space around an Aeros defender, and rifled a low wrist shot from the faceoff circle that beat Besner five-hole.

Three picturesque goals by the Panthers in front of a big Saturday afternoon crowd at SARC showcased the depth of scoring and talent in the U22 squad's lineup.

Panthers' leading scorer Van Berkel buried an empty netter with 1:18 left for her 32nd of the season—earning an assist for Martone who came precariously close to a "Gordie Howe

Hodgins' 86 saves power Tigers' sweep of Buzzers

From page 20

The persistent visitors pulled Frattaroli with 2:33 left in the game for an extra attacker. With 1:54 on the clock, the Buzzers took advantage of their 6-on-5 when Caiden Clair banged home a rebound on the edge of the crease past a sprawled Hodgins.

The Aurora goaltender fended off the game-tying goal on a doubly-deflected puck at 1:05 and managed to get in front of a ricocheting shot with 36 ticks on the clock to preserve the Tigers' victory. Hodgins was mobbed at the end of the game by his teammates.

On Sunday in Toronto, Mazanik, Cayden Smith, and Cirone paced Aurora's attack with one goal each in the club's shutout victory.

After a scoreless first period, Mazanik's power play goal gave the

Tigers a 1-0 lead.

2:45 into the final frame, two Tigers reached milestones to make it 2-0. Smith tallied his 20th of the season and earned Bundzenieks his 30th assist of the season.

Cirone closed the scoring five minutes later when he finished a passing play started by Jamie Buscarini and Jonathan Scott.

Sandwiched between the weekend wins versus the Buzzers was an 8-1 loss to the high-flying, first-place Golden Hawks in Trenton on Friday night. Hotles' power play goal—assisted by Rosella and Mazanik—was scored in the second period to pull the visitors to within two goals at 3-1. However, Trenton fired five unanswered goals to improve their OJHL East-leading record to 45-9-0-2.

Hat Trick" versus the Aeros after drawing a four-minute Head Contact infraction in the second period. The feisty forward finished with a goal, an assist, and a pugnacious penalty—a tri-partite performance of which "Mr. Hockey" and old school fans would approve.

The seventh-place Panthers (29-17-0) dropped a 5-0 decision to the 5th-place Stoney Creek Sabres on Sunday and will close their regular season on the road: in Oakville versus the 20th-place Hornets on Thursday; and in Whitby versus the 13th-place Wolves on Saturday.

Two regulation three-point wins on the road trip would vault Central York over the Burlington Barracudas into the sixth seed for the OWHL playoffs.

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RYAN COLLIE
THE DR. G.W. WILLIAMS SECONDARY SCHOOL

Ryan Hankinson is a 15-year-old Grade 10 student at St. Maximilian Kolbe Cath-Ryan Collie is a Grade 12 student at Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School where he has been a dedicated member of the boys' basketball team throughout all four years of high school. He's a forward on the court with a strong all-around skillset and remarkable athleticism and character according to his Wildcats' coach, Neil Joshi.

"Even though he was our leading scorer and rebounder for several years, he has always demonstrated humility, grit and tremendous work ethic," said Joshi. "He has always led by example and has grown into a more vocal presence on the court. I've always appreciated Ryan's maturity as an athlete. He chooses to lead with his actions and hard work."

Ryan's approach to the game is inspired from afar by his favourite athlete, Russell Westbrook of the NBA's Sacramento Kings. His consistency, work ethic, and understanding of team play have made him a reliable presence on Joshi's team.

In addition to basketball, Ryan also excels at flag football and he's done sprints in track for the school as well. He enjoys rock music – specifically Nirvana and Green Day.

Away from competition, Ryan is committed to giving back to his community. He has volunteered at the Elevation Athletics Basketball Camp for 5 to 15-year-olds, helping young athletes strengthen their skills while building confidence and a love for the game. He also participated in the York Region Police's Crime Prevention Academy, an experience that broadened his understanding of leadership and community responsibility.

In September, Ryan will enroll in the Athletic Therapy program at Seneca College at the King Campus. With his passion for sport and desire to support others, he looks forward to potentially building a future helping athletes stay healthy and perform at their best.

Congratulations, Ryan!

Shayne Smith and Paul Rosen are star attractions at Sport Aurora's second ParaSport Event at SARC

BY JIM STEWART
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

The dynamic presence and inspirational messages of Shayne Smith and Paul Rosen were at the heart of Sport Aurora's second ParaSport Event at SARC on Monday afternoon.

Over 23 attendees benefitted not only from the encouraging words of Smith and Rosen, but by their introduction to four sports at the "Try It" event: bocce, volleyball, basketball, and sledge hockey.

Quadruple amputee Smith explained the satisfaction he derives from ParaSport events.

"People with cognitive disabilities are some of the happiest people I know. Look at those smiles out there. Sports changed my life and I want to help them

understand the value of sport. Many of the guys are so quiet coming into the gym and then you can't get the smiles off their faces."

Smith described his longtime connection to a variety of ParaSports:

"I started off with sledge hockey, but I fell in love with Wheelchair Basketball through Variety Village. I was given a chance to play and started to score, so I made the Ontario Junior team and then the Canadian team in 2003. I played so well in the provincial championships that I competed in two Canadian championships. I retired at 25 and wanted to focus on my public speaking and I went on to play in the world wheelchair rugby championships. I broke a few ribs."

Smith motivational words were the driving force behind not only Rosen's recovery from the trauma of a leg amputation, but also to his rise as a stellar goaltender on the Olympic Gold medal-winning Canadian Sledge Hockey team.

"I met Paul when I was 12 and he was 39. He was whining about his amputation and I challenged him by asking, 'Do you still have your heart?' Next thing I know, he was the best sledge hockey goalie in the world."

Rosen, whose connection to Smith and all the attendees was evident as he worked through the bocce, volleyball, basketball, and sledge hockey activities, applauded Smith's timely encouragement that helped him cope with the setback of an



Auroran photo by Jim Stewart

amputated leg in his late-30s.

The Olympic champion offered a significant tribute to Shayne Smith at the Olympics in Utah: "Inside my blocker, I stitched SS inside it for the Salt Lake City Olympic

games."

The 65-year old broadcaster and motivational speaker looked resplendent in his Olympic jersey and gold medal as he posed for photos and acknowledged the best part of his role as an exemplary figure to so many.

"Getting kids to believe in themselves. I lost my leg at 39. Next week, I'm going to my seventh Paralympic Games: three as an athlete and four as a broadcaster. I try to encourage everyone that we need to separate ability from disability and that greatness can be found in participation."

The Sharon resident explained how these themes have motivated him in both his athletic and broadcasting career.

He was the oldest rookie in Paralympic Winter Games history at age 41. Rosen was the starting goaltender for Team Canada in the Olympics of 2002, 2006, and 2010 and has worked as a broadcaster at the 2014 Games in Russia, the 2018 Games in Korea, the 2022 Games in Beijing, and was flying to Italy on Friday to work for CBC, TSN, and OBS at for the 2026 Games in Milan.

His globetrotting adventures are captured in his biography entitled Never Give Up: The Meaning of My Life—co-written with FAN 590 Radio voice, author, and lecturer Roger Lajoie. Rosen's life story is filled with engaging anecdotes, including his connection to an Order of Canada broadcaster and legendary Hockey Night in Canada personality.

"Don Cherry was such a huge part of reclaiming my stolen gold medal. In

February 2007, Don went on Coach's Corner and said that 'The rat that stole Rosey's gold medal has to give it back. Drop it off at the police station, in a mailbox—no questions asked.' Don's offered a plea worked. I got it back."

Ron Weese, President of Sport Aurora, expressed his satisfaction at seeing Smith and Rosen in the Desjardins Gym and that ParaSport events have gained traction in the community.

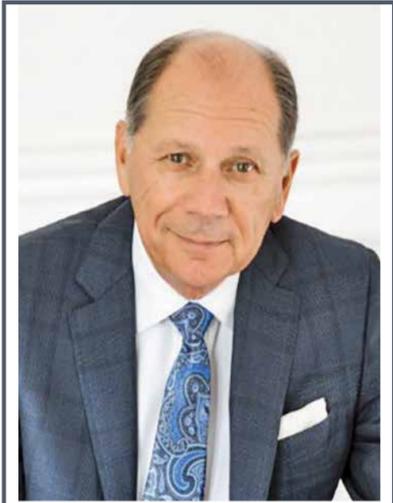
"This all got started off a chance meeting with Community Living's Andrew Fagan. I was telling him that we don't have a ParaSport program to offer. He was all on board. We met with ParaSport Ontario and this is our second event—this time with 23 participants; 24 last time. Community Living brings their supervisory staff and we have a few of our volunteers to help out, including Anthony Garramone and Laurie Mueller. We'll be doing a feasibility study about ParaSport and would like to offer an annual program."

Fagan, the CEO of Community Living Central York, echoed Weese's insights about the value of the event and loved seeing its impact on the participants: "The best part of this is the energy in the room. In such a small amount of time, it's great that they have pulled off this event for people with diverse abilities. To feel that energy with so many partners in the community and to see twenty-three participants having fun through sports is very satisfying."

The long-time director applauded the progress of ParaSport in Canada: "I've been in the sector for 25 years and it's great to see the skills in the room today—especially from the Ambassadors who bring so much to events like these. However, as much as communities say they're diverse, we still have a lot of work to do."

Fagan praised the presence of York Region Police Officers and Central York Firefighters in the Desjardins Gymnasium who were participating fully in the events.

"It's more than just the energy they're bringing to the gym this afternoon—it's about how they're building these community relationships. Overall, our vision coincides with Sport Aurora and we're happy that over twenty-three families are involved today and thriving in the moment."



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Victoria Hall should remain a community space, say residents

From page 9

open to public scrutiny. Transparent leadership uses words like 'authentic,' 'humble,' 'open-minded', and helps build rationale behind decisions to build trust, morale, and accountability.

"You cannot convince me that when the final budget was approved last December, no one knew about what was coming down the pipeline for potential escalation and costs for renovations. We waited 10 years to take action on potential Victoria Hall

renovations. It's not going to fall down this year. Why put the rush? Why not put it to election time this fall? Please don't tell me this has no impact on taxes. The [tax] levy, maybe. But who built that pool of funds? We did, the taxpayers. If it's truly called the 'People's Budget', why not ask people during the fall election period what people might think or want? Why not have staff complete an engagement process like we did on the official plan for the Town Park refurbishment?"

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Mayor Tom Mrakas and SAC Head of School Kevin McHenry participated in the ceremonial puck drop.

Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger

Wristbands on sale now for annual Easterpalooza Celebration

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Spring is just around the corner and the Town of Aurora is putting the finishing touches on one of its signature events of the season – Easterpalooza.

Easterpalooza will take place Saturday, April 4, from 9 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. at the Aurora Seniors' Centre and Aurora Community Arboretum on John West Way, featuring a morning of Easter-themed interactive outdoor and indoor activities, including flower planting, a hopstacle course, story walk, and a chance to meet the Easter Bunny.

Wristbands for the popular annual event are on sale now at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex, Joint Operations Centre, Aurora Town Hall, Aurora Town Square, and the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex.

Wristbands are \$5 for each child between the ages of two and 12 and are free for everyone aged 13 and older – and each child with a wristband will receive a themed goodie bag at the event.

Organizers urge you to act fast to secure wristbands soon as they're strictly limited.

"One change we have this year is that only children 2 – 12-year-old require a wristband; guardians, parents and grandparents are free," says Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora. "With how popular this event has been historically, there will only be 950 wristbands available. A lot of people wait to purchase their wristbands because they're waiting to see what the weather is going to be, but I really encourage you to not wait and hold it on the weather. There's a minimum of 12 indoor activities, and this event has a true balance between what's offered outside versus what's offered inside."

If you've been to Easterpalooza, Ware and her team promise "fresh and exciting" elements – and elements that appeal to the whole family.

"This is one event where we definitely see multi-generations in attendance," she says. "It's so often that we see children, plus the guardians or parents, but also grandparents, aunts and uncles."

To be a part of the fun, purchase your wristbands at the above locations during regular business hours. For more on Aurora's 2026 Easterpalooza, visit aurora.ca/Easter.

Regimental day kick-starts milestone year for St. Andrew's College

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

The rich heritage of St. Andrew's College was on full display on Saturday as the independent school hosted the 48th Highlanders of Canada for their varsity team's final home game of the hockey season.

The regiment helped open the game with their pipes and drums, but it wasn't just about pomp and circumstance; it signals the start of a milestone year for St. Andrew's College. (SAC)

This year marks both the 120th anniversary of the regiment's affiliation with SAC and the school's 100th anniversary in Aurora.

In the century since they planted their roots in the southwest quadrant of Yonge Street and St. John's Sideroad, the school has grown exponentially and the community along with it.

Saturday's ceremony brought much of this history together as they looked towards a fulsome community celebration this fall.

Saturday's extra special game was the brainchild of Dave Manning, Head Coach for the Varsity Hockey Team, who noted how much the team had embraced the Regimental motto of Dileas Gu Brath, Gaelic for "Faithful Forever," and he and Brian McCue, Commanding Officer of SAC's 142 Highland Cadet Corps, set out to make a Regimental Appreciation Day a reality.

"Dave spearheaded the event and we ran with it. The nice thing is that right away I said, 'Okay, this is not going to be a small event,' because we built a committee, got the approval of the Head of School and the Board of Governors to do this, we created a committee with all the major players involved, now suddenly it became an Old Boy event," said McCue. "It's our parents, our current students, the community and then, as we built that committee, all of a sudden the layers started to show how exciting this day could be: it's the 100th anniversary

of St. Andrew's in Aurora and it's a celebration of community."

From there, organizers strove to ensure it was also a day to honour all members of the Canadian Armed Forces – past, present, and future – and highlight the importance of the Royal Canadian Legion within the community.

"It is a community celebration as well as a recognition of our long-standing traditions with the 48th Highlanders, but at the core, of course, was the hockey game and the team," said McCue.

To celebrate the occasion, SAC players hit the ice with regimental jerseys featuring the 48th Highlanders cap badge, and the day featured other nods to these long-standing links.

"The boys have embraced it," says McCue. "[Students] hear the Regimental motto a lot throughout the course of their career here at St. Andrew's, but I think what's really important is they looked at it that it isn't just history; yes, we had Andrians fight in the First World War with the Regiment and in the Second World War, but it's not just history, this is a living regiment, they're going to be here, and we're going to celebrate."

And the celebrations are only set to continue throughout 2026.

While the finishing touches are being made on a community celebration this fall, McCue said 100 years of links between the school and the local community here in Aurora are only getting stronger.

"I've been here at St. Andrew's long enough that I can remember when we were still kind of more attached to our Toronto campus and holding onto our traditions there. We had our annual church parade downtown at St. Paul's, which was our home there for a long time. Suddenly we thought, why are we still doing this? Our home is Aurora. We've built our partnerships and we've built our relationships," he said. "The church parade is a prime example when we moved it up here. The feeling

of parading out of the gates at St. Andrew's through Aurora is absolutely fantastic. In the 100th anniversary of the Cadet Corps, the Town granted us the Freedom of the Town, so that was very meaningful for us as well building those official ties.

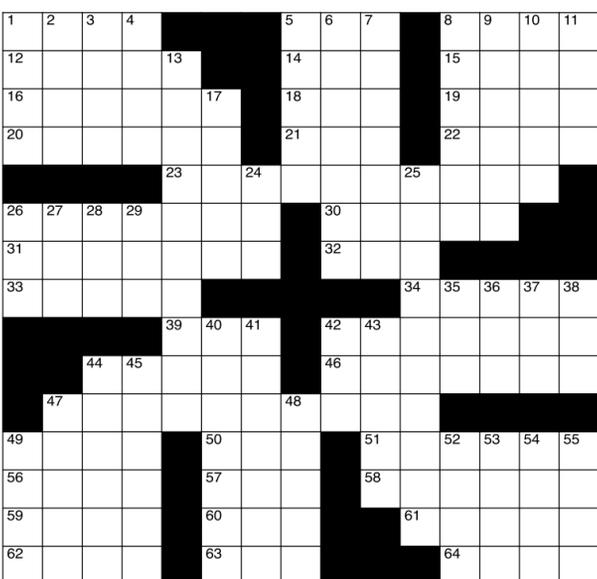
"It's ceremonial, yes, but it's something we cherish and celebrate every year."

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Puzzle No. TAMAR526 • Solution in Classifieds



CLUES ACROSS

- Unit of dry measure
- One who defies authority
- Social media giant
- Render holy
- "Much ___ about nothing"
- Computer manufacturer
- Creed
- Immoral act
- Mountain pass
- Winged nut
- Don't know when yet
- Elected officials
- Corrupt tendencies
- Popular adult beverage
- Made a mistake
- Morally correct
- Type of whale
- Portable conical tent
- Native people of the Congo

- More (Spanish)
- Classroom implements
- Cognizant of
- One who tells
- Free from bondage
- Thick piece of something
- Containing two adjacent nitrogen atoms
- Removed from the record
- Legendary singer Turner
- Broke up the earth
- Hunting expedition
- Contributes
- Unit of work or energy
- Wreckage on the sea bed
- Affirmative! (slang)
- Witness
- Scrape (Archaic)

CLUES DOWN

- "___ and flows"
- Humble request for help
- A position of leadership
- Continent
- Adherent of a particular religion
- Things that can be eaten
- Self-governing Netherlands territory
- Long-tailed crow
- Repeated
- Bluish greens
- Humanities
- Someone who serves in the armed forces
- Labor (Spanish)
- Zero
- Shared by involving three parties
- Queens ballplayer
- Consumed
- Rest here please
- Men's fashion accessory
- American time
- Sound unit
- They ___
- Soviet Socialist Republic
- Places to play video games
- A sudden attack of illness
- When you hope to arrive
- Charges
- Actress Seyfried
- A tributary of the Ohio River
- Omit when speaking
- Armored fish
- Remain
- From a distance
- Adventure story
- Geological times
- Eat dinner

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THINGS... you ought to know

MARCH 10 - APRIL 18

Memory Lane Home Living invites caregivers and their loved ones experiencing cognitive changes to join Art from the Heart, a creative arts program facilitated by an Art Therapist. This hands-on program offers an opportunity to explore art activities, spark creativity, and encourage connections with other families on the same journey. The program takes place each Tuesday from March 10 - April 28 at the Aurora Public Library. Free. To register and for more information, call 905-237-1419, or visit memorylanehome.com.

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

The Town of Aurora is proud to partner with York Region and NewMarket to bring a Repair Café to Aurora, giving residents a hands-on opportunity to fix everyday household items, reduce waste, and support a circular economy. Taking place on Saturday, March 28 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex (AFLC), Program Room C, the Repair Café invites residents to bring in broken, well-loved items, from bicycle chains and small household items such as small appliances to electronics and broken clasps. Skilled volunteer fixers will be on hand to help repair items free of charge, extending their lifespan and keeping them out of landfill. For more information, visit aurora.ca/repaircafe.

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.

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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.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

From page 4

Donations will be gratefully accepted at the event, with all proceeds going directly to support the vital work of Abuse Hurts.

Following the presentation and luncheon, attendees will continue a long-standing CFUW A/N tradition: a unity walk down Main Street to the Water Street Bridge. This year, the march is fueled by a profound surge in national pride that has resonated deeply across the country over the past year and reached a crescendo as we celebrated the record-breaking achievements of Canadian women at the recent Olympic Games.

Club President, Denyse Slack highlights this surge of patriotic spirit: "This walk is a celebration of solidarity with our sisters around the world, and there is no better time to carry that torch. Drawing from the inspiration of our Olympic athletes,

singing 'O Canada' at the bridge feels especially poignant this year. In these uncertain times, leaning into our national pride is a powerful way to demonstrate our collective unity and resilience."

The event is also bolstered by the generosity of local business partners. A special thank you goes out to Longo's Aurora and Vince's Market, who are sponsoring the event's dessert table. Following the traditional unity walk to the Water Street Bridge to sing "O Canada," attendees will visit Cocoa 40 and The Olive Oil Co., both of which have welcomed IWD guests for the past three years with special treats.

CFUW is a non-partisan, voluntary organization working to improve the status of women and girls through education and advocacy.

To learn more, visit cfuwaauroranewmarket.com.

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Stan Douglas (b. 1960), *Masonic Lodge, Barkerville* (detail), 2006, laserchrome print, 127 x 145 cm, courtesy of the artist, Victoria Miro, and David Zwirner © Stan Douglas

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