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Aurora's Community Newspaper

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WEEK OF APRIL 2, 2026



Welcoming Arms volunteers John, Sam, Dana and Sally were hard at work at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church on Monday morning preparing for the launch of their new Meals Plus initiative this week. **Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger**

Sustainability, demand sees significant shift for Welcoming Arms

Meals Plus program launched this week

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Welcoming Arms has served community members in need since 2006, but as their 20th anniversary of service approaches this fall, the ecumenical volunteer organization is making a significant shift in operations to meet growing demand in a sustainable way.

This week, Bridging the Gap, one of Welcoming Arms' many programs will see the launch of a new program – Meals Plus.

Meals Plus, which will provide Bridging the Gap clients with three frozen meals a week, is a year-long pilot project to maximize sustainability within the program which is billed as a "place of friendship, hope, and a caring listening ear," connecting individuals to local resources while also providing them with household supplies, gift cards, and more.

The pivot towards Meals Plus will see Welcoming Arms place increased emphasis on meal distribution rather than gift card distribution in what they hope will be a more financially sustainable model to meet growing community demand.

"We were looking at Bridging the Gap and looking at the length of stay [of clients] in the program and thought, is there a way we can more sustainably offer something that directly addresses food security and keeps that connection

Continued on page 13

Get "Active" at Chamber's annual Home Show

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

The Stronach Aurora Recreation Centre is a great place to stay active – especially when it provides the backdrop to the Aurora Chamber of Commerce's annual Home Show.

This week, the Aurora Chamber of Commerce is putting the finishing touches on its signature annual event, which will take over the SARC on

Continued on page 9

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SENIOR SHOWCASE – The Aurora Legion was a destination for arts on Saturday hosting the second-annual CHATS Community Arts Showcase, featuring the creativity and talent of older adults in the community, including Doug, pictured here with some of his work. For more, see Page 15. **Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger**

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Easter Bunny hopping excited for Saturday's Easterpalooza fun



Mayor Tom Mrakas chats with the Easter Bunny in his office last week.

Photo courtesy of the Town of Aurora

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Petch House is ready to welcome the Easter Bunny this weekend as the Town of Aurora puts the finishing touches on its Easterpalooza celebration.

Set for this Saturday, April 4, at the Aurora Seniors' Centre from 9.30 a.m. to 12.30 p.m., Easterpalooza offers a morning of Easter-themed family fun with the rabbit of the hour ready to hold court and take photos in the newly-renovated Petch House.

Ahead of their Aurora trip, just a few hours before their international eggcellent adventure that evening, The Auroran sat down with the Easter Bunny for the inside scoop on what to expect.

The Auroran: Easter is a bit early this year. What are you doing to get prepared so quickly?

Easter Bunny: There's lots; there's my physical prep, but then there's also the space prep. Physically, I'm still in my training game because that day is a pretty big day for me. I'm still doing my warm-ups, my stretches, and really, really exercising. For the space in Aurora – oh, my gosh, this year I'm absolutely tickled pink because I'm going to be, as I always am in Aurora, in the Petch House, but it's all been redone and I'm going to feel like such a super rock star in there. I'm very excited to see the kids come in to meet and take photos with me! I'm just enamoured with how great Petch House looks!

TA: Do you prefer an early Easter or one later on?

EB: Maybe the later one because I'm getting older every year, so I need the extra time to exercise and get in shape for it. If it's later, the chances of weather being more favourable is also on my side. It might be more favourable, but I'm always super, super egg-cited for the day.

TA: What does it mean to you that, for many people, Easterpalooza is the unofficial kick-off to spring in Aurora?

EB: It's a huge catalyst kick-off! I've already seen in some of my spy-scope technology that the birds are out now. It's a whole new spring, it's a whole rebirth, and I get to be, I think, the one that leads the way in officiating the real start of the spring season!

TA: I saw you got a bit of a sneak peek meeting with Mayor Mrakas in his office last week.

EB: I had to give him really positive feedback about how gorgeous Petch House is and also, as Easter is a little bit earlier, I wanted to see if he had any ability to impact the weather, because that would be really, really appreciated!

TA: Regardless of weather, what sorts of activities do you hear they have planned for outside Petch House and inside the Seniors' Centre?

EB: I've heard that there's a minimum of at least 10 outdoor activities, including a hopstake course. There's going to be bocce ball, all Easter-themed, as well as some egg drops, some egg tosses, some would-you-rathers, and some amazing photo ops!

TA: How about inside?

EB: Inside, there will be live bunnies and baby chicks, which are always very cool to see. I wish they were with me in the Petch House, but I've been told that's not possible! Inside, there's going to be a big, huge inflatable. There's going to be mock egg fishing, craft stations, face painting stations, bunny bowling. There's just so much being offered. I think some of the big highlights is going to be the really cool Easter Basket bouncy castle that's coming in. Kids like to bounce, and after all, being a bunny, I have to agree with them. I mean, who doesn't like to hop and bounce around? I also love it when the kids do the crafts first and the face painting, because by the time they come to see me, they already got their bunny band ears on, their faces all painted up. It's really enjoyable for me to see.

TA: Do you have any idea what the turnout will be?

EB: Well, when I was talking to the amazing Access Aurora staff, they told me there's about 200 wristbands sold already. So, oh my gosh, I get to see 200 kids. I'm hoping the sales will still increase, but when I heard that, my countdown started, my tail started wiggling and the excitement really grew because, I mean, in a few days, this is all going to be happening again.

TA: We understand wristbands are still for sale through Friday at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex, Aurora Town Hall, Aurora Town Square, Joint Operations Centre, and the SARC through end-of-day Friday, but will any be for sale on Saturday morning?

EB: Not at the Seniors' Centre, but there will be wristband sales at Aurora Town Hall across the parking lot. Wristbands are \$5 for kids aged 2 – 12, and admission is free for those under two and those 13 and over. It's always an indoor and outdoor event. Sometimes families will wait to see what the weather's going to be on the day of, but regardless of how the weather is, the event is guaranteed to be egg-celent, so get your wristbands in advance!

For more information on Saturday's Easterpalooza, including wristband sales and if you and your family have any accessibility requirements, visit aurora.ca/easter or call the Town's Special Events line at 905-726-4762.

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MICHAEL PARSA, MPP
Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Coalition of Civil Society Organizations calls for a halt to Conservation Authority changes

In anticipation of the introduction of legislative changes to enable the sweeping and ill-conceived consolidation of Ontario's 36 Conservation Authorities into nine, a broad coalition of civil society groups, individuals and a local elected official are calling on the Government of Ontario to halt this plan and listen to experts and local voices to re-empower the Conservation Authorities.

To date, the Government of Ontario has provided no evidence or business case to justify its planned consolidation of the Conservation Authorities. This proposed consolidation limits local decision-making, ignores science-based watershed knowledge, puts our communities at greater risk of flooding and water quality issues, undermines source water protection for our drinking water and dismisses concerns from a broad spectrum of organizations and thousands of residents of Ontario.

"The Conservation Authorities were created to make better land use decisions. This proposed consolidation undermines their vital role in protecting our communities. We need to empower them to do their work independently as our watershed experts," said Tony Morris, Conservation Policy and Campaigns Director, Ontario Nature.

"This proposed consolidation threatens the livelihoods and conservation efforts of farmers and Ontarians as a whole. We oppose legislative and regulatory changes that erode protections for farmland and natural heritage lands, and that diminish transparent, democratic decision-making," said Josh Suppan, President, National Farmers Union – Ontario

"The scope and scale of this consolidation will not deliver improved consistency or customer service. Instead, it will weaken local watershed expertise, dilute community representation and disrupt nearly 80 years of successful Conservation Authority operations. We oppose this consolidation proposal," said Lesley Lavender, CEO, Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Associations

This coalition of organizations and individuals urges the province to work collaboratively and meaningfully with municipalities, Conservation Authorities, First Nations and civil society organizations to develop real solutions that protect public safety, support smart planning, maintain local trust and enable effective watershed management.

ON Nature

Region marked Earth Hour

On behalf of York Regional Council and The Regional Municipality of York, I am proud to recognize Earth Hour on Saturday, March 28, 2026.

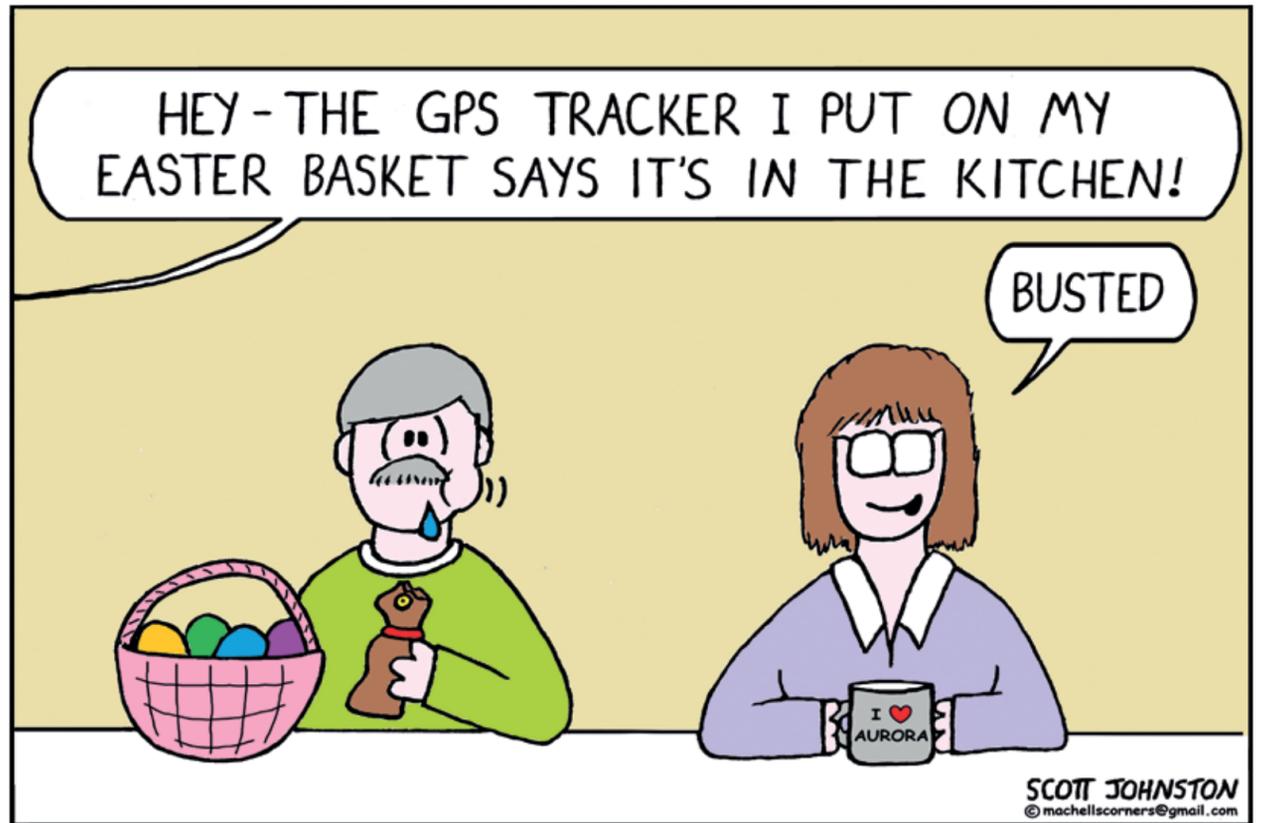
Earth Hour is a global movement that brings together millions of people, communities and organizations to show their commitment to the planet. Each year at 8:30 p.m. local time, participants around the world switch off non-essential lights for one hour, demonstrating a shared commitment to reducing energy use, raising awareness of climate change and protecting our environment.

York Region is proud to take part in this important initiative. During Earth Hour, non-essential lighting will be turned off at the following Regional facilities:

- York Region Administrative Centre, 17250 Yonge Street in

Continued on page 9

Machell's Corners



Returning the Momentum

Maybe it's the classic movie fan in me, but whenever anyone talks about making a comeback, I can't help but think of the film, *Sunset Boulevard*.

In the film, an up-and-coming screenwriter, through a series of events, is swept into the life of Norma Desmond, a silent screen star just waiting for the "talkie" fad to fade before she can once again take her rightful place atop the Hollywood Heap – with the right comeback vehicle, of course.

A comeback? Excuse me. According to Desmond, it's not a comeback, but rather a "return" to where she's meant to be.

If you've seen the picture, you know how it turns out. She makes a return to public consciousness, all right, but certainly not in a moment of triumph – but hope springs eternal, right?

I couldn't help but chuckle last week when journalists scammed Steven MacKinnon, Canada's Minister of Transport and Government House Leader, ahead of this past weekend's NDP leadership race.

The question: "Do you think there will be a resurgence of the NDP, a resurgence of the threat from the left given the momentum they have right now?"

It was a question that evidently took the Minister by surprise.

After his eyes widened a bit and a smirk formed on the corners of his mouth, he replied, "Um, momentum?"

On first blush, it's a fair question.

Canadians have been down this road before.

Since the party that lead what was then Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition from 2011 – 2025 was decimated at the polls in the last Federal election, losing Official Party status in the process, it's been a question of just who might be the right person to capture the public's imagination and bring the NDP back to the top, or close enough.

By the same token, it was a similar question when Michael Ignatieff led the Liberal Party of Canada to a drubbing in the 2011, the worst showing of the party in its history, as it happens, resulting in a slashed caucus of just 34 seats.

Who would be the right person to capture the public's imagination and bring the Liberals back to the top, or close enough?

The Liberals were lucky to have party scion Justin Trudeau just around the corner and whether you like him or not, the fact that he quickly engaged the electorate and harnessed its momentum towards victory can't be denied.

Vying to be that person for the NDP this time around were union leader Rob Ashton, municipal councillor Tanille Johnston, filmmaker and activist Avi Lewis, incumbent MP Heather McPherson, and



BROCK'S BANTER

Brock Weir

long-time NDP candidate Tony McQuail.

The five candidates brought a breadth of experience and vision to the table, yet, in the days leading up to the leadership convention, an Angus Reid poll of voters who cast their ballots for the NDP sometime over the past four Federal elections, found 44 per cent had no idea who was even running for the top job.

"It does speak to really the extent of the hill that the NDP has to not just climb, but claw their way up to re-pierce the psyche of a significant segment of Canadian voters," Angus Reid president Shachi Kurl told CTV News.

That's not a good sign of the health of our democracy by any measure, but the data made Minister MacKinnon's response somewhat understandable, and Canadians by and large may have had the same reaction.

But momentum can only be underestimated at one's peril.

Whatever political affiliation you hold close to your heart, I think most of us can agree that Canadians are dissatisfied in one way or another. Beyond partisan bickering, the average Canadian is struggling more to make ends meet and simply get by.

While Prime Minister Mark Carney is enjoying comparable popularity here at home and abroad, if his more centrist approach to most things doesn't bear fruit in the next couple of years – assuming, of course, that a Majority Government will be in sight before too long – momentum is going to go one of two ways: back to the Conservatives, or potentially a new path.

This is something that Sunday's victor, Avi Lewis, seems to recognize.

"Canadians are living on the edge," he said following his decisive victory. "We're under economic attack from the US. While Donald Trump stomps around the globe grabbing foreign leaders and oil fields and starting wars he has no idea how to stop. And at the kitchen table in Canada, there's an even bigger crisis. The everyday emergency of just trying to get by in an

impossible economy. Whether you're on a single salary, hustling with multiple gig jobs, or taking care of loved ones, working hard no longer earns you a living. I know every politician says they feel your pain. And they claim to be outraged by the sky-high price of everything. But what they won't talk about is why. An economy that's rigged for the rich, leaving the vast majority of us behind."

Taking aim at what he described as a "tiny group of billionaires who control every part of our economy" and politicians who will blame anyone but themselves for the issue, he said Canada was now at a crossroads.

"Our plan is to Trump-proof the economy by investing massively in Canadian economic independence, using the unmatched power of public ownership to ensure the fundamentals of a good life. A network of public providers for food, phones, and internet. A public housing developer and public construction companies to build millions of non-market homes. A 21st century electrical grid, an EV bus revolution, and a heat pump in every home, built with Canadian steel, creating tens of thousands of unionized jobs. Investing in the care economy as true nation-building. The education, health care, elder care, and child care that holds our social fabric together. And finishing [Tommy Douglas'] dream: eyes, teeth, mental health, medicine. They are all part of your health. They have to all be part of our universal public health care system...."

"We've got to start winning now. We know we can live in a country built on a foundation of care and connection. Where you don't have to fight every day just for the basics. Where hard work earns you a living and if you can't work, you're not abandoned. And where our kids know we are doing everything we can to protect the air and water and their right to a livable future. That is why the NDP is coming back. Because we know that a thriving world is possible and we know who is standing in our way. And there are way more of us than there are of them. We just have to find each other."

Time will tell whether the NDP is indeed coming back, but what's certain is it's making a return – a return to the House of Commons, to hold leadership to account, and be a voice for its constituents. In a healthy democracy, that's a big win.

It might be a tall order as Lewis works not only to engage Canadians but win over the party's Provincial counterparts in Alberta and Saskatchewan without the benefit – yet – of a seat in the House of Commons, but, in this current climate, any underestimation of the party and where Canadians are at just might be a mistake.

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



With the sun finally peeking out from behind months of grey clouds, we are all ready to enjoy some time outdoors with our loved ones. This photo (2022.8.195) from about 1940 shows members of the Charles family (Burwell and Bernice, Aurora-born twins, are just above the boy on the left), enjoying a lavish picnic in the woods. Although Burwell moved to Alberta, Bernice lived in Aurora for her entire life. This photo posed the question: where were they, and what car were they driving? Whatever it was, its tires' treads were well worn!



GETTING THINGS DONE

Mayor
Tom Mrakas

From day one in 2018, I knew Aurora had work to do. For too long, we were falling behind when it came to protecting and expanding our parkland. We weren't investing enough, and we weren't thinking far enough ahead. So, we changed that. We didn't wait for the "perfect" moment — we created it through decisive action and leadership that puts people first. Because we made a clear choice: to invest in what families value most — parks, trails, and green spaces where community happens.

Since then, we've upgraded parks, playgrounds, and trails across our town, helping connect neighbourhoods and promote active living. We opened Highland Gate Central Park in 2023 and John Abel Park in 2024. And we took it even further by securing 28

acres of new parkland — the largest land acquisition for parks Aurora has seen in a generation. That didn't happen by accident. That happened because of intentional leadership and a commitment to protecting what matters most.

Those lands include a 16-acre property along Yonge Street, the former George Street School site, and two critical properties on Henderson Drive. And when it mattered most, we stepped up to protect Henderson Forest — preserving endangered

species, safeguarding rare trees, and standing up for something that simply cannot be replaced. That's Aurora at its best. That's what happens when leadership listens, takes action, and delivers results.

And just like our work to expand the David Tomlinson Nature Reserve, we're not just talking about protecting nature — we're doing it. The results speak for themselves. Aurora's tree canopy has grown from 28 per cent a decade ago to over 34 per cent today, and we're on track to reach 40 per cent by 2035. That's more than just a number. It's something residents can see, feel, and experience every single day.

Because this is how you build a stronger community: not by chance, and not by talk, but through action.

Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre recently concluded a series of highly successful visits to the United Kingdom, Germany, and the United States, strengthening economic relationships and promoting Canada on the world stage. From the auto plants of Detroit to the energy sector in Houston and financial institutions in New York, Pierre is building bridges so our goods can be traded tariff-free to the United States and beyond.

This outreach extended beyond traditional diplomacy. Appearing on The Joe Rogan Experience, one of the world's most influential platforms with over 20 million subscribers and interviews with major outlets like Bloomberg, Pierre connected directly with millions, presenting a vision of opportunity that resonated with workers, investors, and policymakers alike. Whether in boardrooms or long-form discussions, the message was consistent: Canada has the resources, talent, and potential to compete globally.

At the core of this vision is a renewed focus on leverage. For too long, Canada has limited its own potential through restrictive, anti-development policies that leave us vulnerable in times of global uncertainty. Conservatives believe Canada must be stronger at home to be unbreakable abroad. With the world's fourth-largest oil reserves and 10 of the 12 NATO-defined critical minerals, Canada has the tools to be not just a reliable partner, but a strategic necessity.

To unlock this potential, Conservatives are advancing a focused plan: establishing a Canadian Strategic Energy and Mineral Reserve, repealing



COSTAS' CORNER

MP Costas Menegakis
Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill

the impact assessment regime under Bill C-69 and replacing it with a clear six-month approval timeline, and securing fair access for Canadian industries through tariff-free agreements and exemptions from "Buy America" provisions. This includes relaunching major projects like Keystone XL and building new infrastructure to move Canadian energy efficiently to market—generating billions in economic activity and supporting thousands of high-paying jobs.

At the same time, Conservatives are looking outward. By strengthening partnerships with allies such as the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand through a CANZUK framework, Canada can diversify its trade and reduce reliance on any single market. Interest from countries like Germany in Canadian liquefied natural gas underscores the global demand for our resources. Expanding into these markets will provide greater economic stability and opportunity for Canadian workers across sectors.

Canada's resilience has always come from being both bold and pragmatic.

We have seen firsthand how our proximity to the United States is not a limitation but a tremendous advantage, and how strong relationships with our allies open doors for Canadian workers, families, and businesses. Mark Carney declaring a permanent rupture in Canada's trading relationship with the United States not only weakens our bargaining position but is short-sighted. Canada should be aggressively pursuing tariff-free trade with the United States while simultaneously building the supportive infrastructure necessary to expand trade with the rest of the globe. By investing in our resources, and expanding our trade with like-minded partners, we can build a Canada that is prosperous, resilient, and respected on the world stage.

The Conservative vision is clear: a country that is affordable for families, safe for communities, and rewarding of hard work. By restoring economic strength and expanding our global presence, Canada can move beyond years of stagnation and reclaim its place as a confident leader on the world stage. I firmly believe that by building a robust economy, supporting hardworking families, and cultivating strong relationships with our allies, we can build a Canada that is resilient, prosperous, and secure. This is about real, tangible impact on Canadians' daily lives, creating stable jobs, affordable living, and safe communities. By standing strong at home and engaging confidently abroad, we can ensure that Canada not only competes but leads, empowering future generations with the opportunities they deserve and securing a proud and thriving nation for years to come.

BY DAVID SUZUKI

Renewable energy saves lives and money

Rising fuel prices hurt almost everyone — driving up the cost of transportation, food and electricity (even when much of the latter comes from cheaper renewable sources). Rising living costs disproportionately harm those who can least afford it. The ultra-wealthy don't have to worry much, and those who profit from polluting, climate-altering oil and gas get to add more to their already overflowing coffers!

Recent price hikes — during a growing affordability crisis — are in large part due to the United States' ill-advised and poorly planned attacks on Iran. These compelled Iran to choke shipping in the Strait of Hormuz, through which one-quarter of the world's seaborne oil and gas is moved.

The horrific conflict illustrates the volatile nature of fossil-fuelled economies and shows the need to get away from fossil fuels as quickly as possible — not just because of their lethal pollution and climate impacts but also because clashes over who controls them cause so much death and destruction. Despite false claims about drug smuggling, the U.S.'s recent violent actions against Venezuela were also about securing oil supplies.

Unmoved by the clear advantages of renewable energy over energy from coal, oil and gas — lower costs, less pollution, greater supply and price stability, improved energy independence, reduced conflict — petrostates and fossil fuel-supporting governments continue to impose measures to stall renewable energy development while incentivizing fossil fuel expansion.

The U.S. offers a clear example, but even in Canada, Alberta continues to throw roadblocks onto the renewable path while clearing the way for more oilsands, liquefied natural gas and coal production. One of the province's largest and most important companies, ATCO Ltd., is even blaming the Alberta government for "a \$408-million hit to the value of its wind and solar projects," arguing that government energy and electricity policies are "detrimental" to renewable energy investment. The company is considering legal action.

Among other recent restrictions, Alberta imposed a moratorium on renewable energy development in 2023 and is promoting oilsands and LNG expansion and new pipelines. Along with the federal government, the province is offering tax breaks and other incentives for oil and gas companies to do what they should and could afford to do themselves, such as building carbon capture facilities and cleaning up the tens of thousands of inactive wells they've left behind to pollute water, land and air.

The fossil fuel industry is driving up living costs for most people, polluting and heating the planet, widening the wealth gap and contributing to deadly conflict worldwide. As the planet surpasses the 1.5 to 2 C warming limit countries adopted under the Paris Agreement, we're seeing consequences as bad as or worse than scientists and others predicted: accelerating extreme weather events, massive floods, prolonged droughts, more water shortages, rising sea levels, widespread disease transmission, increased human migration and ongoing hostilities. Yet we continue to needlessly pump increasing amounts of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

Why do we put up with it? Why do governments and news media entrusted to represent and reflect the public interest put so much money and effort into keeping this dying, destructive industry alive? Why are some of the world's most powerful nations raining horror and death on countless people in oil-producing countries?

Guardian columnist George Monbiot says we're being "gaslit" for

Continued on page 25



PURPLE DAY – Purple Day, a day to promote epilepsy awareness, was marked at Town Hall on Thursday, March 26, with a special flag raising ceremony at Town Hall. Community members joined Mayor Tom Mrakas and Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese, and Town Staff for the occasion, embracing both the cause and the purple dress code. **Aurora photo by Glenn Rodger**

CMHA's Hearing Voices program helps support people with "realities that differ from societal norms"

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Nicole D. Parker was once told she would not only be unable to go back to school because she was too unwell, but she wouldn't be able to work, either.

When a friend asked later on why she couldn't go back to school, she couldn't think of an answer – and now Parker shares her story in the hopes of inspiring others as one of the co-facilitators of Hearing Voices, a one-of-a-kind support group for "individuals who experience

realities that differ from societal norms – including psychosis, schizophrenia, and hearing voices."

Parker, who is based out of Alliston, has brought professional expertise and lived experience to the group for almost eight years and is dedicated to normalizing these experiences "while reducing isolation and loneliness through a judgement-free, supportive environment."

Parker says she developed the workshop for alternate realities, or what she describes as "busy brains", and subsequently pitched it to the Canadian Mental Health Association of York Region (CMHA-

YRSS) and South Simcoe. It was a model quickly picked up by the CMHA and she and co-facilitator Brian hit the ground running.

"It's been pretty important to us," says Parker. "I always say labels are for soup cans, so I talk more about normalizing the experience and having it welcomed because we talk about anxiety, we talk about depression, but then when people start saying stuff like, 'The Queen of England is coming to save me,' people don't listen as much as if they're saying they're sad. I want to normalize the experience, have a place where people can come and share their experience without feeling judged, and they're heard."

Hearing Voices started out as an in-person meet-up organized out of the CMHA's Aurora offices, but has remained virtual since the Global Pandemic, allowing them to reach people throughout York Region and South Simcoe.

Parker stresses whether it's in-person or online, it's a safe environment for everyone and an open forum for dialogue.

"You can ask whatever questions you want. I'll answer any questions," she says. "I've had people who have asked me, 'Have you heard positive voices' and 'Have you had positive experiences?' I'll say, yes, and they'll ask what happened to it. I'll tell them when I took medication, they slowly faded away, but they're still there really quietly. I'm honest with my experiences."

Indeed, touching upon how the idea of "hearing voices" was approached over the years, she says the early half of the twentieth century, sometimes hearing voices was interpreted as a "spiritual psychosis," but that is just one example of the brain trying to "rationalize" the experience.

"They'll make a connection because your brain has to rationalize why you're having these feelings and emotions and hearing these voices," she says. "It's like normalizing and validating the experience."

I'm not here to say if it's real or not real; I'm there to support them, get them through that feeling and have them feel better. People can be as private as they want in this group. If they just want to have their camera and mic off and just listen, they can do that. They can write an alias if they want an alias name, as long as we know the right name for the organization. If you don't want to be identified, but you want to be a part of the group, we can make that happen. If you need support and you're scared of that stigma or being identified, we're there to help. Self-stigma is a big one. We share personal stories, too. For instance, I was told that as a psychiatrist I'd never be able to go back to school because I was too unwell and that I'd never work. I got told all these things, but someone said to me later in life, 'Why can't you go to school? What's the big deal?' I was like, 'Oh, I guess I can.' To give hope rather than saying you're not going to be able to do something is better."

"I find that people really enjoy the group. In one session, I'll talk about how to scrapbook, track your voices and map them. One gentleman said he's found that really helpful because he was able to do the tracking, but also used it for his addiction. People were able to use the group for two things rather than just the voices."

Hearing Voices is run through the CMHA-YRSS' Community Connections Program. For more information on living with psychosis and the various ways the CMHA might be able to help, visit cmha-yr.on.ca/living-with-psychosis.

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Aurora Pride Festival sashays into “Just Peachy” second year



Members of the Aurora Community Band and Borealis Big Band performed a showcase of Pride-inspired music at the inaugural Aurora Pride Festival (pictured) last year, and are warming up for the second-annual party this spring. **Auroran file photo by Glenn Rodger**

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Aurora’s first Pride Festival last year was one for the books, and organizers and community partners, are sashaying forward to a second-annual success.

Aurora’s 2026 Pride Festival, hosted by the Aurora Community Band (ACB) and the Borealis Big Band, in partnership with the Town of Aurora and York Pride, will take place at Aurora Town Square on Sunday, May 31, from 1 – 5 p.m., and volunteers bringing the program together promise an afternoon of family-friendly fun that is even bigger than last year.

“Last year was really about launching something meaningful. This year is really about building momentum on that given how many people attended and had such a fantastic time,” says Warren Fetterly of the Aurora Community Band (ACB), who is once again co-organizing the Festival with Gord Shephard, leader of both the ACB and the Borealis Big Band. “Our model is really based in music and art being the conduit to have and share acceptance. Both bands are coming back this year with excellent sets of Pride-inspired music curated by Gord, which is amazing, we’re having a drag entertainer, Just Peachy, come out and add a little glitter and glitz to Brevik Hall, and we’re adding a new table, the Sugar & Sass Dessert Bar with Pride-inspired treats.”

This year, the Aurora Cultural Centre is taking on an added role with a curated art display in the Centre’s Great Hall Gallery.

At the end of the day, the event is about “coming together to celebrate

diversity, inclusion, and community in the heart of Aurora.”

Doors open at 1 p.m. with interactive displays from local arts organizations, businesses, and Pride organizations, along with a chance to have your photo taken with Just Peachy. Opening ceremonies will follow at 1.15 p.m., with messages from Mayor Tom Mrakas, Aurora Town Square’s Phil Rose, and York Pride’s Jacob Gal.

Entertainment will get underway at 2 p.m. with the Borealis Big Band in the Aurora Town Square Performance Hall, at 3 p.m. with interactive displays and Pride-inspired activities – think a wig-off – led by Just Peachy, and return to the Performance Hall at 4 p.m. with the Aurora Community Band and a special lip-sync performance from Just Peachy.

Participating organizations and businesses include Aurora Town Square, York Pride, the Aurora Black Community Association, Aurora Cultural Centre, Aurora Historical Society, Aurora Museum & Archives, Aurora Public Library, Dave’s Vinyl Party, Marquee Theatrical Productions, My Indie Coffee, Pflag, Pine Tree Potters Guild, SOYRA (Society of York Region Artists), the Town of Aurora’s Sport and Recreation Departments, and Theatre Aurora.

“One of the greatest successes of last year was we were able to get so many of the community organizations from Aurora to participate in the Festival and demonstrate their support for the Pride community,” says Shephard. “The fact they’re all coming back again this year to be a part of the festival I think is a really great indication that the event was

successful. I’m really concerned about providing an opportunity for the citizens of Aurora and for the organizations, be it businesses or arts organizations, to have an opportunity in an overt way to display their support for Pride.

“I think the band performances alone make it worthwhile coming out to it. Then we have all these wonderful activities that are going to be occurring before and during the hour-long intermission between the two bands. It wasn’t unexpected, but maybe something that happened last year that we were really happy about was the atmosphere and the vibe of the whole event was really great. I think it’s going to be better

this year because we’ve given more time for that, and there are going to be more activities that are going to be occurring between the two band performances. We’re looking forward to seeing how that works, but I think it’s going to be really great.”

If Shephard’s favourite takeaway from the inaugural event was seeing the community come together, it’s a sentiment shared by Fetterly, but through a different lens:

“It was having my transgendered son, for the first time, be in a space that was curated more to him, and him feeling comfortable and opening up more than he normally would in public – it was pretty cool!”



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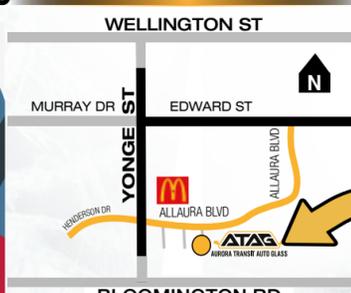
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Proposed Leslie and Wellington development raises questions about SARC use

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

A proposed subdivision of 74 townhouse units on the northwest corner of Leslie Street and Wellington Street East, adjacent to the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex, raised questions around the Council table last week due to plans for an access point to the homes through the SARC's driveway.

At issue is a plan for 74 townhouse units – 42 standard and 32 back-to-backs – with a right-in, right-out access point from Wellington Street, and another access point through the municipally-owned SARC driveway.

While Council members praised the development bringing new residential units to the community, particularly some back-to-back units attainably priced starting at \$699,000, questions raised at last week's Public Planning meeting touched upon density and how the SARC access might impact an already-busy public space.

The plan calls for 163 parking spaces for the 74 units, including 15 visitor parking spaces, and some Councillors expressed worry that overflow parking from the development would naturally flow to the SARC.

"In terms of the SARC, I tried to understand maybe the rationale behind it and some of the pros and cons to it. I did a little bit of a cursory [look] to try to understand if there's anything similar in the Town and the only thing I could think of is the Mosaics Avenue subdivision just behind the old Canadian Tire off Murray," said Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo, who said he wasn't sure if he was for or against the proposal, but trying to understand the impact.

Also raising questions was Ward 4 Councillor Michael Thompson who said back-to-back townhouses with only one allocated space per unit has created parking issues elsewhere in Aurora.

"We already hear enough about people saying that they're using the garage for other things than parking their cars. The practicality of it all makes me think that some of these homeowners are going to use up those visitor parking spaces as permanent, which means... where are they going to park? They're going to park at the SARC," said Councillor Thompson. "If the road is open to the SARC, it definitely will encourage them to park in the SARC. In fact, it actually might be closer for them to park in the SARC than park in any of those visitor spots. I'm concerned with only one unit, one

parking space available for the back-to-back townhomes in the north because I think it's going to lead to a problem.... I look at all the driveways, I look at the configuration, I don't think there's any on-street parking, either. Where is everybody parking? It's going to be at the SARC.

"We already have concerns about some of the other developments about parking in the SARC and now all of a sudden we could be running into a future issue [with] residents at large wanting to use that facility will have limited parking spaces because of the developments that are happening and going there."

The benefit of access to the SARC to the developer was clear, said the Councillor, but there needs to be a "benefit to the community at large."

Concerns were echoed by Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner who said if she was one of the homeowners in question she would park as close as possible to the SARC lot.

"I really don't think that they're going to go as far as the east area of the SARC lot, which is true, is often quite empty, but not when there's a lot of activity at the SARC," she said, adding she also had concerns about liability for the Town if the parking lot became an access point for the subdivision.

Council members agreed that the SARC driveway should be considered by the Region for a future signalized intersection to control traffic flow. But, as this is not yet being considered by Regional Council, the Town could have to go it alone.

"As far as the traffic light, absolutely we need one in this area at some point, but I don't think the Town should be paying for it," said Mayor Tom Mrakas. "I think that both developments, there's one that's going to be on the south side [of Wellington] and this one can fully fund the installation and implementation of that signalized intersection."

One Councillor who was less concerned about the access point was Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland who suggested she would have liked more vertical density in the area.

"Given the fact that it is a condo-type community, it's not unusual [to have] no parking on the street and rely on visitor parking," she said. "In fact, there is a bit of an advantage that of course we have the SARC around the corner, but I don't really foresee that being something that will be abused. Is it something we should be concerned about and speak about today? Absolutely. Do we want to make sure the developer realizes that



Image courtesy of the Town of Aurora

we want to ensure that the minimums are being presented today and that's not something that you're going to be building the foundation of your application on? Absolutely. Is it a reason for me to say that I feel this application wouldn't be something good to move forward to the next community to hold? I'm not going to hold them to that. I do appreciate the comments around the table on this, but I certainly would not

want to hang my hat based on some of those comments.

"I think my biggest bone of contention right now is ensuring that we have some good amenity space and green space for the families that are there because it is something that is very near and dear. We want to make sure that families have a place for the kids to play and walk their dogs, and that is really the biggest bone of contention for me."

Development Charge reduction greeted with optimism

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

An \$8.8 billion agreement between the Federal and Provincial governments will support municipal infrastructure investments while helping reduce development charges.

The move was announced Monday by Prime Minister Mark Carney and Premier Doug Ford, and comes with an HST rebate intended to incentivize new home construction.

The majority of the \$8.8 billion in funding over 10 years will support the reduction of Development Charges (DCs) "by up to 50 per cent" of the charges normally collected by municipalities from developers to account for the impact growth has on existing infrastructure.

DCs have often been cited as a key factor in housing affordability and Monday's announcement will "offset much of the financial impact of DC reduction on municipalities."

"However, municipalities will also be expected to support DC reductions, so that all three levels of government are supporting increased housing supply and affordability," said the Federal and Provincial governments in a joint statement. "The Province will work with municipalities and partners to put forward a list of infrastructure projects for approval with a focus on speed and efficiency. These strategic investments will encourage new home construction and reduce barriers and costs to housing development to help more people realize the dream of homeownership."

This week's announcement was part of a multi-pronged approach to affordability, said Prime Minister Carney. "Our new partnership with Ontario is about building more affordable homes, more transit, and more careers in the skilled trades," he said. "We're tackling the housing crisis from every angle – so we can build up housing supply and bring down costs for Canadians. We're building Ontario strong and Canada strong."

Added Premier Ford: "Today's agreement will be transformational for Ontario and Canada, delivering new homes, transit, and infrastructure, and supporting hundreds of thousands of good-paying jobs for Ontario workers. Our government will continue to deliver on our plan to protect Ontario in partnership with the Federal government and municipalities by lowering the cost of building, getting shovels in the ground faster, cutting red tape, and investing in workers."

The reduction of DCs was greeted with cautious optimism by local leaders,

with Mayor Tom Mrakas suggesting the devil will be in the details.

"I am encouraged by today's Federal-Provincial announcement to reduce municipal development charges by 50 per cent on new homes for the next three years – this is a meaningful step that has the potential to unlock housing starts on stalled approved projects and get shovels in the ground faster," said Mayor Mrakas in a statement. "Together with last week's announcement to remove the HST on new home purchases, it's clear that real action is being taken to make homeownership more attainable.

"Just as important, I'm pleased to see the commitment from both levels of government to ensure municipalities are properly funded. Development charges are a critical funding source that support essential infrastructure – from roads and water to parks and community spaces – and without proper funding, these costs would ultimately fall on existing taxpayers, which I do not support."

Mayor Mrakas added the Town will be "reviewing the details closely" to ensure the changes work for Aurora, "supporting housing delivery while protecting financial stability and the services residents rely on."

Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo called it a "significant step forward" in addressing housing affordability.

"This is a meaningful shift – recognizing that affordability isn't just about demand, but about reducing barriers to supply," he said. "For municipalities like Aurora, this also raises important conversations: how do we balance development charge reductions with maintaining the infrastructure our residents rely on? How do we ensure growth remains sustainable and aligned with community needs? The opportunity here is real, but so is the responsibility to get it right at the local level."

The HST rebate on new homes will see the Federal and Provincial governments work together to remove the full 13 per cent of HST for eligible buyers of new homes valued up to \$1 million and extend the maximum rebate amount of \$130,000 to new homes valued between \$1 million and \$1.5 million.

"The Federal government will provide Ontario a payment in the amount of \$875 million, subject to passage of Federal legislation, that may be applied against the Federal five per cent portion of the HST that is being removed from new homes in Ontario. This partnership would provide an estimated \$2.2 billion in total tax relief for housing in Ontario and provide homebuyers up to \$130,000 in tax relief," said the governments.


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Get “Active” at Chamber’s annual Home Show

From page 1

Saturday, April 11 and Sunday, April 12 – but with a new twist.

This year, in partnership with Sport Aurora, the event has been rebranded the Aurora Chamber Home & Active Living Show.

This year’s Home & Active Living Show will have something for everyone, from a full range of inspirational ideas for your home, indoor and outdoor design trends, dozens of vendors, fun activities to keep kids occupied, and, of course, plenty of opportunities to shop local.

“It’s exciting,” says Alison Mumford, Executive Director of the Aurora Chamber of Commerce, of helping plan her first Home Show since formally taking the helm of the Chamber earlier this year. “Credit to Sandra Watson, our Events Manager, for really laying the framework for this event.”

The partnership with Sport Aurora, which will offer demonstrations throughout the weekend, will emphasise the “living” aspect of the Home Show brand while also shining a light on the more than 40 organizations under the Sport Aurora umbrella, including martial arts and dance.

“I think it really helps to prove that there’s something for everyone at this show,” says Mumford. “Sport Aurora will have live demonstrations and we’ve partnered once again with Backyard Pool & Spa as well on a larger feature area. It’s just a really fun community event.

“Every year we try to get a really good variety of vendors and not saturate in any one space. We try to limit the number of landscapers, construction contractors, interior designers so they’re not competing against each other for buyers, but also to allow us that variety because your home is not just the walls and what’s inside; it’s also outside – it’s landscaping, its pools, but it’s so much more than that. It’s the lifestyle aspect that you can connect

with different non-profit organizations who are maybe looking for different people to get involved as volunteers, get involved with the community, and I think our Home Show really focuses on that community aspect of what’s going on in Aurora. I feel like it’s a good, true representation of Aurora.”

Other new features of the 2026 Aurora Chamber Home & Active Living Show include the re-introduction of Chamber Bucks and a money booth you can hop into and collect the Bucks which can then be spent within the local community.

“We’re trying to partner with businesses that maybe can’t have a specific booth at the Home Show – we can’t bring an entire restaurant there to have the same experience – and we’re really trying to bridge that and promote shopping locally, not just at the Home Show, but beyond the Show as well. Reintroducing these Chamber

Bucks is kind of cool. Everybody wants to jump into the money machine and see how much they can get and it’s just a fun activation, but there’s also a good message behind it, that the Chamber really does value and care about shopping locally.”

There is also a \$500 giveaway and more details can be found at aurorahomeshow.ca.

“There’s truly something for everyone; whether you’re a homeowner, a parent, a senior citizen, a millennial, Gen X, or whatever it is, there are different activations, different people to talk to, connections to make, and it’s just a community event to experience,” says Mumford. “We have really put a focus on trying to get more kid-friendly activities, including face painting, there’s a partnership with some local businesses to bring in pottery painting, colouring contests, a dance booth, and our fan favourite, Coach Steve is back

Sport Aurora will have live demonstrations and we’ve partnered once again with Backyard Pool & Spa as well on a larger feature area. It’s just a really fun community event

again – and the Chamber Pub & Grill is back for those looking to get a quick bite while they explore.”

For more information on the 2026 Aurora Chamber of Commerce Home & Active Living Show, including a full vendor map, check out our special Home Show feature in the second section of this week’s edition of The Auroran.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

From page 4

- the Town Newmarket
- 17150 Yonge Street in the Town of Newmarket;
- York Region South Services Centre, 50 High Tech Road in the City of Richmond Hill;
- York Region Transportation Operations Centre, 90 Bales Drive in the Town of East Gwillimbury;
- York Region Community and Health Services, 9060 Jane Street in the City of Vaughan.

While this symbolic act lasts just one hour, it reflects our broader, ongoing commitment to environmental sustainability. Across York Region, we continue

to invest in energy efficiency, climate resilience and sustainable infrastructure. These investments help reduce our environmental footprint while supporting healthy, vibrant communities.

Earth Hour is also a reminder that collective action matters. Small steps, when taken together, can lead to meaningful change. I encourage all residents, businesses and community partners to take part, whether by turning off lights, spending time in nature or taking simple actions that support a more sustainable future.

Together, we are building a cleaner, greener and more resilient York Region for generations to come.

Eric Jolliffe
York Region Chairman and CEO

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Porchlight Arts aims to amplify arts, create “homegrown cultural experiences”

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Creativity, culture and connection are what make a community feel alive, and this is the driving force behind Porchlight Arts, a new group of community organizers dedicated to supporting local arts and culture, while creating new “homegrown” experiences for the community.

Porchlight Arts formally launched Thursday night at the Micak Gallery, one of the newest private arts venues in the community located at St. Andrew’s Village Plaza.

The volunteers behind Porchlight began laying the groundwork for the organization about six months ago and, at last week’s launch, shared one of their first large-scale initiatives, which will be a nod to their name – an evening this fall where the porches of homes in the Town’s historic core will be activated with music and “unexpected” art.

“At its core, Porchlight Arts is about inspiring and energizing our community through culture, creativity, and connection,” said Lauren Hanna, a founding member of Porchlight. “It all started with a simple observation and conversations among the founding members that what we have here in Aurora is really, really incredible, and we wanted to amplify that. From Town Square, the

world-class performing arts facility, to the galleries and creative spaces that we have, the music festivals that come through, like the Winter Blues Festival that we just had, and the caliber of the artists who are here locally creating, we realize there’s so much to celebrate. We asked ourselves, how do we make this a bigger part of Aurora’s identity, a source of pride for residents and business owners here, and also a destination that people want to come to from outside of Aurora?

“We know something important: when people come for arts and culture, they don’t just visit one place, and this is highlighted in the Town’s tourism strategy earlier this year. They go to local restaurants, they shop at local businesses, they stay overnight. So, there’s also a very enriching local impact economically that we can celebrate, too. And that’s what Porchlight Arts is all about. We want to celebrate and amplify what’s already happening. We want to help spread the word about incredible things that are happening here, whether it’s promoting it ourselves or collectively, and we want to do more to foster collaboration between businesses, potential venues, artists, sponsors, just even to amplify what’s happening at the Cultural Centre or Town Square. We just know there’s more that can be done. And we want to create something special together.”



Supporting last week’s launch of Porchlight Arts were Katie, Kim, Deanna, Lauren, Steph, and Arianna.
Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger

Thursday’s opening reception brought out representatives from the Town, Aurora Town Square, the Aurora Cultural Centre, the Aurora Public Library, and other cultural partners within Aurora.

Organizers stressed this was just the first milestone on a journey towards further collaboration.

“This is not something we plan to create on our own, and we can’t do it alone,” Hanna continued. “Just by being here tonight and being in this room, we’ve already taken an important step in that direction.”

The fall event was expanded upon by Ariana Dalie, another founding member of Porchlight. The owner of music production company Happiness Mafia and an Aurora resident of more than 18 years, she says she was inspired by the arts scene in Collingwood, ON, and wanted to foster these cultural connections here at home.

“Being connected with a music company and working with artists,

I thought we’d reach out to some wonderful ladies that I knew would make this possible, and they’re here, and they’re willing to get this going,” Dalie told the audience at the reception. “Thank you so much to everyone for coming and being a part of this, I think we’re going to create something great.

“We have many ideas, many visions, and in September we plan to have an event where we need your help. We plan to have music, art, and just create something amazing. We’re going to need sponsors, we’re going to need venues, we’re going to need artists, and we’re going to be reaching out to all of you and see how you can support us and be a part of it. I think as a community we want to make this place great. We want people from Toronto to come here instead of us going to Toronto, so I think that’s really important – and I think as a community we can make this happen.”

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Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger

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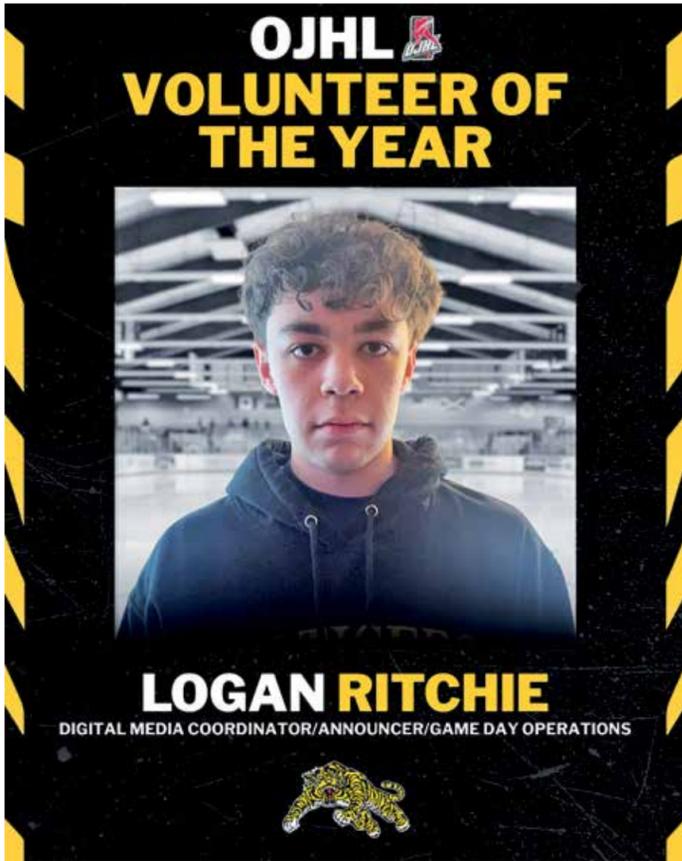
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WEEK OF APRIL 2, 2026

Aurora Junior Tigers' PA Voice and Digital Designer Logan Ritchie named OJHL's Volunteer of the Year



BY JIM STEWART

Logan Ritchie—the Aurora Tigers' PA voice and Social Media guru—was named the 2025-26 Ontario Junior Hockey League's Volunteer of the Year on Wednesday.

The Grade 11 student at Sacred Heart Catholic High School in Newmarket was taken aback when he read about the honor bestowed upon him by the OJHL.

"I was really surprised—I didn't expect it all. I opened my phone and saw 'Aurora's Logan Ritchie Named Volunteer of the Year' on the website and said to myself, 'Wait a sec.' I was honored and really happy."

Tigers' General Manager and Head Coach James Thomson described Ritchie in the most glowing of terms during his interview with OJHL staff.

Aurora's recently-installed Head Coach complimented Ritchie for "completely tak[ing] over and reinvent[ing] our digital footprint."

"Logan's dedication to his craft, consistent ingenuity, and persistent attitude has resulted in one of the best social media presences in our league. We're incredibly lucky to work with him."

When Thomson's words of praise were read to Ritchie, the 16-year-old aspiring electrician noted that it made him "feel great."

"I'm glad—and I appreciate—that they've placed their trust in me. I loved hearing that from James—this will motivate me even more. I feel valued."

Ritchie is in his fourth year as a tireless volunteer for the Tigers and he noted that of all the jobs he carries out for the Junior A club.

"It's the Media I enjoy the most. I keep

getting better and better at it. I enjoy promoting the team, the players, the big plays, the birthdays—I like to get the ideas out there and like working from my desk."

When asked to define the most enjoyable part of being the Tigers' PA voice, Ritchie described the energy created by "being around the game environment—it's great. The players have appreciated what I've done during the games over the last three years."

He also described the benefits of assuming so many responsible positions with the Tigers.

"I really like doing the work—it fills the weekends and I like doing this job on the side. It gives me a strong background."

Ritchie discussed how his experiences with the Tigers complement his school work at Sacred Heart CHS which he described as "a good place. I have no complaints."

He added that his favorite subjects in Grade 11 are "Math and Science—I recognize their importance – but I'd like to go to Trade School. This semester, I'm doing a four-credit Co-Op package with an electrician in Keswick. We drive around and provide residential, industrial, and commercial repair services. I'd like to go to Seneca to study to become an electrician."

The Tigers' Digital Media Coordinator and Game Day Operations Executive acknowledged that there will be electricity in the air when he's recognized by the 24-team association during the OJHL's Championship Series in April.

When asked how such a centre ice ceremony will make him feel in a loud arena in Junior A hockey hotbeds such as Collingwood, Trenton, or Stouffville, Ritchie noted that "I'm going to feel honored."

"It'll be an incredible experience. I can't believe where this is going, I started doing this for the Volunteer Hours, but after three years, it's become much more."

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JOCELYN ZOU

WHISPERING PINES PUBLIC SCHOOL

Jocelyn Zou is a well-rounded Grade 8 student who demonstrates excellence across athletics, the arts, and community involvement. Jocelyn actively participates in volleyball, basketball, dance, and gymnastics.

Volleyball is Jocelyn's favourite sport and she currently plays for the Storm Typhoon 14U Division 1 team, where she is in her second year of competition. At school, she takes pride in giving back by helping coach junior teams and assisting with volleyball club activities. Her dedication, focus and persistence were recognized when she became the only student in her school to achieve the "1,000 Club," successfully completing consecutive volleyball bumps against a wall.

"She is a strong leader both on and off the court," explained teacher-coach Nicole Currie at the school. "She helps build the confidence and skills of her teammates by encouraging others and supporting them as they develop their fundamental abilities in the sport. She leads with positivity and charisma and her teammates often look to her for advice and encouragement when they need support."

In addition to volleyball, Jocelyn trains in small-group basketball sessions with the Air Eagles Academy. She continues to strengthen her game while mentoring younger athletes. She has also recently started gymnastics training to build confidence and develop tumbling skills that support her progress in dance.

Jocelyn's passion for the arts is equally impressive. She has been dancing since the age of three and has performed in numerous community events, including every Markham Youth Spring Festival Gala from its inaugural event to the 9th Gala in 2026. She has also earned first place in the Youth Group category at the CNTV 2024 Dance Competition. Outside of dance, Jocelyn enjoys playing the tuba in her school band and working toward completing her Grade 7 piano conservatory.

Since the age of six, she enjoys sketching and painting in a variety of styles. For her achievements, Jocelyn has received multiple certificates of recognition from community leaders and was selected as a 2023 International Youth Friendship Ambassador.

Jocelyn is excited to attend G.W. Williams Secondary School in the fall.

Congratulations!



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Junior Panthers bash Burlington Barracudas 5-1 to close pool play at OWHL U22 Elite Eight Championships

BY JIM STEWART

Ellie Lewington, Anastasia Trifon, Zoe Ordanis, Audrey Martone, and Lily Paisley scored one goal each to pace Central York to a 5-1 win over Burlington on Saturday afternoon at the Scotiabank Pond in Toronto.

With the decisive victory over the Barracudas, the Junior Panthers closed out their 2025-26 season on a winning note.

Despite beating up higher-ranked Burlington which finished second in Pool B, Central York was eliminated from Sunday's Gold and Bronze medal games after losing two hard-fought contests: 3-1 to the Mississauga Hurricanes on Thursday and 5-3 to the Durham West Lightning on Friday.

Durham West advanced to the Gold Medal game with seven points, based on a 2-1-0 record.

Burlington advanced to the Bronze Medal game with four points after procuring a 2-1-0 record.

Mississauga, which finished 2nd in the 22U Elite Division after the regular season, but stumbled in pool play, failed to advance to the Medal round after accruing a 1-2-0 record and four points.

On Saturday versus the Barracudas, the Panthers were playing for pride and got off to a quick start in their quest to subdue Burlington. Lewington lit the lamp 2:39 into the first period—with helpers from Paisley and Ordanis—to give the Panthers a 1-0 lead.

Trifon gave Central York a two-goal advantage with 7:05 to go in the opening frame—earning assists for Demi Lazarou and Elizabeth Shapira on what turned out to be the game-winning tally.

When Caileigh Tiller pulled Burlington to within one goal at 17:04 of the second period, Ordanis restored the Panthers' two-goal lead less than two minutes later. Annabella Van Berkel and Mackenzie Cotey notched helpers on Ordanis's marker.

With 1:55 remaining in the middle frame, Martone moved the Panthers' lead to 4-1 after being set up by Lazarou and Elizabeth Janovski.

Paisley closed the scoring when the Panthers' power play clicked midway through the third period.

Lazarou and Janovski each earned their second assists of the contest.

The Junior Panthers closed their impressive season as the 7th-ranked team in the 25-team Elite U22 Division and defeated the Kingston Ice Wolves three games to one in the OWHL's Preliminary Playoff Round last weekend to advance to the Elite Eight Championships in Toronto.

Golf courses should be exempt from Clean Communities Bylaw: Councillor

Exemption would only apply to grass, landscaping

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Golf courses rely on landscaping for game play and, when it comes to grass and turf maintenance, should be exempt from Aurora's Clean Communities Bylaw, according to Ward 4 Councillor Michael Thompson.

This week, Council will give final consideration to Councillor Thompson's motion, which was given tentative approval at the Committee level earlier this month.

In his motion, the Councillor says changes would be particularly applicable to golf courses built alongside residential properties.

"The Town of Aurora enacted the Clean Communities Bylaw to establish clear, consistent and enforceable standards for property maintenance throughout the municipality," said Councillor Thompson in his motion. "Standards for grass and yard maintenance are intended to reduce pests and vermin, ensure consistent community appearance, and prevent selective or inconsistent enforcement practices.

"The Town of Aurora contains several fully-operational golf courses, many of which abut and share divisional property lines with residential properties within Aurora and neighbouring municipalities. Golf courses are highly specialized land uses that require agronomic turf management practices distinct from residential or general commercial properties in order to maintain safe, functional, and environmentally managed playing services."

Golf courses, he added, are already subject to provincial regulations governing the use of pesticides, and Aurora applying "standard grass height and yard maintenance provisions of the Clean Communities Bylaw to golf courses may create operational conflicts and unintended enforcement challenges without advancing the original intent of the bylaw."

Should the motion get final approval this week, Town Staff will be directed to bring forward just such a bylaw amendment, applying only to "lands actively used or maintained as part of an operational golf course, and not to vacant, surplus, or non-golf-related lands."

"As you know, we have a number of golf courses, a lot of them have homes bordering on the golf courses. I would, in my experience, say that they operate on a good neighbor policy," said Councillor Thompson at the Committee of the Whole meeting. "They have good relationships with those that border. But at the same time, the way the bylaw is written is that technically they could be in violation of the bylaw for not keeping their grass to a certain standard. For those that are familiar with golf and play golf, we know that on the fringes, sometimes we'll call it the rough, and some golf courses as part of their experience on the whole, they will allow the grass to grow to more than 20 centimeters in the rough, and that... could put them in violation.

"So, theoretically, somebody could lodge a complaint and that would force bylaw to go out and serve a notice of violation. But we recognize, and what we've tried to identify here working with staff is that it's really just those areas that are actually specific to the golf course itself, the areas of play, and that we recognize that these owners, and many of us know them individually as well... they are good stewards of their golf courses. They take pride in their course. They're out there maintaining them all the time. These are not unkept properties. They are manicured and managed in that sense. We don't want to see an issue whereby bylaw is forcing them a violation when really, I think it warrants them being able to manage that aspect of their business."

The good neighbour aspect of golf courses was recognized by Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese, citing St. Andrew's Golf Course on St. John's Sideroad as a particular example, allowing the community to use their trails in the off-season.

Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner asked whether the motion had been spurred by complaints, but Councillor Thompson said it was inspired more by conversations with property owners.

"I do know that there were some conversations had with one property owner and a particular golf course, for sure, and that's partly what spurred some of these conversations in the development of this bylaw," he replied. "Nothing actually happened with those concerns and conversations."

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Sustainability, demand sees significant shift for Welcoming Arms



Dana and Sam were among the volunteers preparing for this week's launch of Meals Plus.

Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger

From page 1

with people who use our services? Quite honestly, we were looking at the cost of running a grocery gift card program and it's just absolutely phenomenal and not sustainable," says Sally Freitas, Executive Director of Welcoming Arms. "We wanted to say we, 'We can help you, but in a different way.' That's where Meals Plus comes in – transitioning people from grocery gift cards to frozen meals, we can still continue to offer support, but we can do it in a way that is more sustainable."

While Freitas says gift cards have often been seen as "best practice" in this particular sector, there is greater funding available for food programs, such as community meals.

Welcoming Arms developed Meals Plus based on the Good Food Impact model out of Stouffville. Once they had all the details in place, including a generous donation from the Aurora Hewy Golf Tournament, which Freitas says was enough to fund the program for about half-a-year, 10 volunteers were hard at work Monday morning preparing the meals out of the kitchens at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church.

The shift towards a meal program is sustainable on another front as well; the new structure enables Welcoming Arms to take part in food rescue programs, such as Flashfood, that distribute surplus meat, produce, and more, sometimes at discounts of more than 50 per cent.

"We can rescue food so, in theory, our ingredients costs can halve," says Freitas. "It's really fantastic. If farmers reach out to us, which they do in the seasons, we can take what's cleared out of their fields and are able to use that. We partner with the York Region Food Network and we host their Market once a month, and if there's leftover produce from there or any of their other markets, we can purchase that at cost and use that. The overarching theme is a very practical response to food insecurity in a population that we have already been serving. We're able to offer them a very tangible solution to the issue they're facing

and also participating in food rescue and keeping food out of the landfill. It's really a big win-win."

Also helping to make the Meals Plus program a reality is Aurora's Cube Packaging, which has donated containers for clients to take home their meals.

"You've got people in the community who are so generously offering their time and that's unbelievable," says Freitas. "You've got people who say, 'Yes, I want to cook. I want to help you plan your meals. I want to help you grocery shop. We want to help distribute meals.' The response from the community has been really outstanding."

The Meals Plus program has been greeted warmly by Bridging the Gap clients as well, although the true measures of success will start to be noted when the program formally launches this week.

"For the most part, [we've been hearing things like], 'Oh, my gosh, where has this been? We don't have to buy ingredients. We don't have to worry and fuss about.' Mothers of young kids are saying this is fantastic, and I think typically men living alone are saying it's an incredible thing to be offering," she says. "It's difficult for some people because gift cards are considered best practice [as] it lends itself to so much autonomy. You can go in and make your choices. What we're saying is we're not stopping grocery gift cards, we'll be offering them for a period of time, and then there's going to be all kinds of things coming along with the grocery gift card program."

"We're going to include a community resource assessment; in the beginning, Bridging the Gap was a program that was started by a couple of ladies in the community who attended a couple of the churches and the original thought was we want to connect with people in the community who may be experiencing challenges in their life and the gift card was sort of a way to get people through the door. 'Hey, come in and chat with us. Let's see what we can work out together.' Over time, the focus has been on the gift

card and that's not necessarily the focus on our programs; our programs are about building community capacity, building individual capacity, connecting, and offering that listening ear."

Having that listening ear will be key in the success of Meals Plus as well, as they solicit feedback from clients to make sure the new frozen meals are meeting the mark and hitting the spot. "Our purpose is to address food

insecurity, to be able to offer a program that's absolutely sustainable, so that it doesn't interrupt well-established relationships between our volunteers and our program visitors, and even in between program visitors. I think Meals Plus is a wonderful solution to a program that was increasingly not sustainable and just finding a way to continue to offer services and outreach."

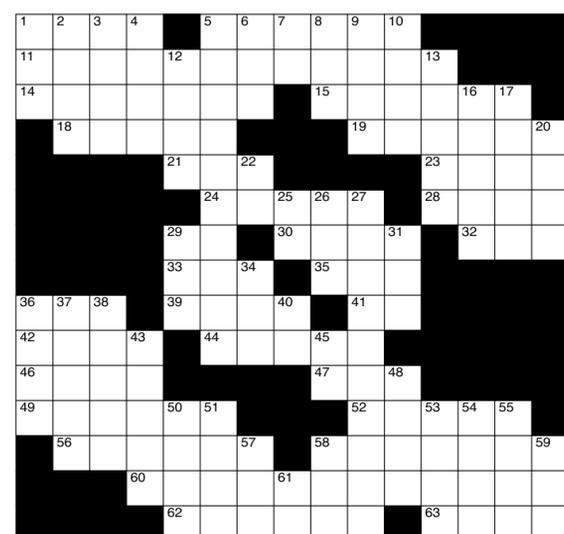
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CLUES ACROSS

1. Absence of difficulty
5. Preserve a dead body
11. Gratitude
14. The act of coming together again
15. More cushy
18. Visionaries
19. Large fish-eating bird
21. Indicates near
23. Former CIA and CIA critic
24. Icelandic poems
28. Pop
29. Hammer is one
30. Selfs
32. Thyroid-stimulating hormone
33. Nowhere to be found
35. Electronic data processing



CLUES DOWN

2. Mimics
3. Expel or eject (variant sp.)
4. Sea eagle
5. Taxonomic category
6. Chinese languages
7. Mr. T's "A-Team" character
8. Consumed
9. Chinese dynasty
10. NFL legend Randy
12. Ireland
13. Palm trees with creeping roots
16. Fungal disease
17. Tall, slender-leaved plants
20. Affirmative! (slang)
22. It says who you are
25. Atlantic coast state
26. Grow older
27. Associations
29. Woman (French)
31. Sunscreen rating
34. Brew
36. Leader
37. Indigo bush genus
38. Burn with a hot liquid
40. Junior's father
43. Mackerel genus
45. Moring
48. Straight line from side to side (abbr.)
50. Type of molding
51. Small, thin or twisted bunch
53. Worn by exposure to the wealth
54. Mars crater
55. Humanities
57. Relating to the ears
58. "To the ___ degree"
59. Residue when something is bur
61. It cools a home

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Pet food bank launched by Animal Services department

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Aurora's Animal Services has launched a new initiative for pet owners struggling to make ends meet.

The new Aurora Pet Food Bank, an initiative of the Town's Animal Services Department, was announced by the Town on Tuesday morning.

It is described as a "community-driven" initiative to keep pets and their families together in challenging times.

"Recognizing that many families may face financial challenges, Aurora's Animal Services has launched a new initiative to ensure that no one must make the heartbreaking decision of surrendering their pet due to the inability to afford food," said the Town in a statement. "The new Aurora Pet Food Bank provides critical support to pet owners in need, supplying them with one week to one month of essential pet supplies based on availability and demand."

"Aurora's Animal Services encourages residents and businesses to donate sealed, dry or canned pet food for cats, dogs, and other small animals."

The Town encourages donations to be dropped off at the Joint Operations Centre at 229 Industrial Parkway North during regular business hours, while businesses with larger donations may arrange a pickup by reaching out to animalservices@aurora.ca.

Donations, the Town notes, will also benefit the Georgina Animal Shelter, Shades of Hope Wildlife Refuge, and other local animal resources.

The new service will be available to pet owners not just in Aurora, but East Gwillimbury and Georgina as well.

Those interested in receiving food from the service are invited to fill out an online application form. From there, Animal Services will package what's needed and arrange pick-up.

Interested pet owners will be asked about their pets, age, food requirements, and more.

"We understand that pets are cherished members of many families," said Mayor Tom Mrakas in a statement. "The Pet Food Bank is a way for our community to come together and support one another, ensuring pets can stay in their loving homes where they belong."

For more, visit aurora.ca/PetFoodBank.

Police appeal for witnesses after string of gas station robberies

Camera warning issued by YRP

York Regional Police are appealing for witnesses to come forward following a string of gas station robberies over the weekend.

"On Monday, March 30, 2026, just after midnight, police responded to a robbery at a gas station in the area of Bur Oak Avenue and McCowan Road, in the City of Markham," say Police. "When they arrived at the scene, officers learned a male suspect entered the gas station, made threats and demands for cash before fleeing the scene with a quantity of currency. There were no reported injuries."

Six additional commercial robberies involving a suspect Police say match the same description occurred March 24 at approximately 11.30 a.m. at a money loan store in Richmond Hill around Yonge Street and Major Mackenzie Drive; on March 25 at approximately 7.25 a.m., at a gas station near Woodbine Avenue and Yorktech Drive in Markham; at 7.50 a.m. the same morning at a gas station near 16th Avenue and Ninth Line; on March 28 at approximately 7.50 a.m. at a gas station near Highway 50 and Langstaff Road; on March 29 at approximately 8.15 p.m. near Steeles Avenue and Dufferin Street; and Monday, March 30, at a gas station located near Major Mackenzie and McCowan Road.

"The suspect is described as a male, 6' tall, thin build," say Police. "He was seen wearing a grey toque, dark shirt, with a black long sleeve underneath, black pants, black gloves and grey footwear. He also

appeared to be using a white shirt as a mask.

"These locations of these incidents are in areas with heavy foot and vehicle traffic. Police are appealing to anyone who may have seen something suspicious, or to anyone with dashcam that was in the area to come forward. Anyone with information is asked to call the York Regional Police Hold-Up Unit at 1-866-876-5423, ext. 6630, or contact Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-TIPS. To leave an anonymous tip online, visit www.1800222tips.com."

CAMERA WARNING

York Regional Police are also urging the public to be aware of cameras being used to "scout" residential properties for break and enters.

The warning follows two incidents where Police say cameras were used to watch residences before committing the crime.

"Two incidents were reported in Vaughan after cameras and battery packs were located on residential properties, disguised with camouflage," say Police. "The cameras were hidden near trees and bushes on the properties. A review of the footage revealed the devices were placed to record homeowners' routines, allowing suspects to scout the properties before committing break and enters."

"Homeowners are encouraged to be aware of this crime technique and to report any suspicious people, items, or activity to police."

COMMUNITY ARTS SHOWCASE



CHATS (Community and Home Assistance to Seniors) hosted its second-annual Community Arts Showcase at the Aurora branch of the Royal Canadian Legion on Saturday, featuring an array of work created by older adults in the community, including (top) Valerie, (middle) Olga, (above) and support from Newmarket-Aurora MP Sandra Cobena, pictured with CHATS CEO Christina Bisanz. "More than just an art show, it is a celebration of creativity and a tribute to the meaningful role older adults play in enriching and shaping our communities," said CHATS. "Older adults make invaluable contributions through their wisdom, life experience, and artistic gifts. Their work provides new perspectives and strengthens our cultural landscape. The CHATS Community Art Showcase is a powerful reminder that the creativity and passion of older generations continue to inspire, influence, and bring people together."

Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger

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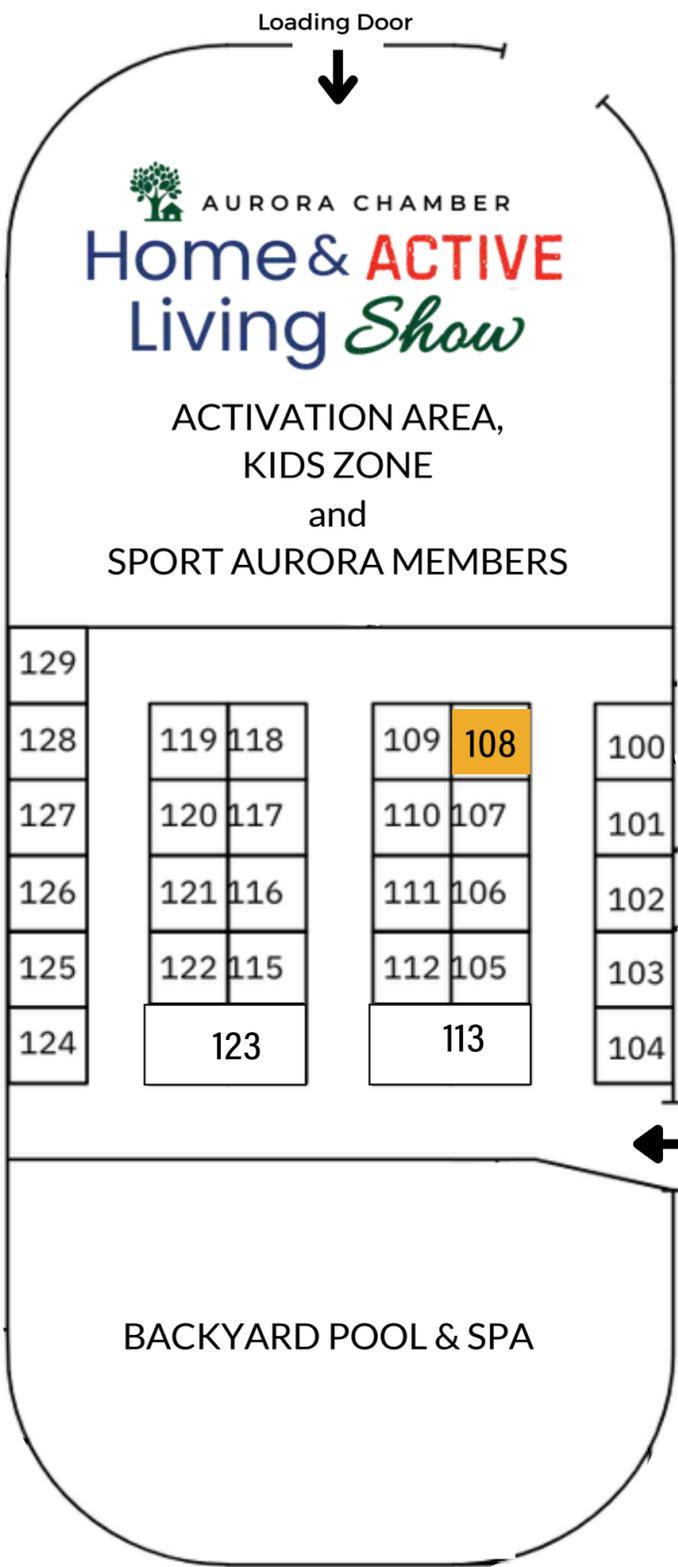
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AURORA CHAMBER HOME & ACTIVE LIVING SHOW ARENA MAP

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5 Trends

The way we live changes constantly, and our homes must adapt. This year, home design focuses on blending comfort, function, and style to meet the demands of everyday life. Whether you are planning a massive remodel or looking for simple updates, a few key concepts are guiding the future of home improvement.

SHAPING THE MODERN HOME IN 2026





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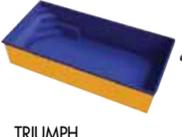
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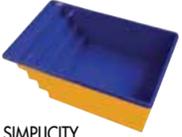
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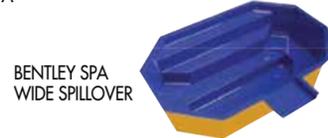
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SUSTAINABLE LIVING

Homeowners are choosing green solutions more than ever. This means picking reclaimed materials, installing energy-efficient systems, and reducing waste. Eco-friendly choices not only help the environment but also lower utility bills. Simple changes like better insulation, water-saving fixtures, and maximizing natural light make a huge impact over time.

SMART HOME TECHNOLOGY

Technology is no longer just for entertainment; it is built into the fabric of the house. Automated lighting, smart thermostats, and advanced security systems offer unmatched convenience. These systems learn your daily routines, adjusting the indoor climate to keep you comfortable while actively conserving energy.

OUTDOOR LIVING SPACES

Backyards have become true extensions of the interior. People are investing in outdoor kitchens, comfortable weather-resistant furniture, and cozy fire pits. Creating a functional outdoor space gives you a private retreat to relax and host friends. These areas are designed to be enjoyed year-round, complete

with covered sections and outdoor heating elements.

MULTI-GENERATIONAL LIVING

Families are changing, and homes are adapting to fit multiple generations under one roof. Floor plans now feature flexible spaces, like finished basements or separated accessory dwelling units. Having dual primary suites or accessible ground-floor bedrooms makes long-term living easier for aging relatives. These clever layouts give everyone their own privacy while keeping the family connected.

TIMELESS DESIGN

While it is fun to follow fads, lasting design relies on a mix of modern function and classic style. Neutral color palettes, natural wood textures, and clean lines create a strong foundation. Investing in high-quality, durable finishes ensures your home will not look outdated quickly. You can easily update these spaces with colorful accents and fresh decor as your tastes change. Making your home fit your lifestyle is a rewarding journey. By focusing on these five areas, you can create a beautiful, efficient space that serves you well for decades to come.



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Weekend mornings deserve a delicious meal that brings everyone to the table. You can skip the long restaurant lines and create a wonderful brunch right in your own kitchen. This golden cinnamon French toast delivers big flavor without the stress, and it takes less than 20 minutes from start to finish. We use thick slices of soft bread, soaking them in a rich vanilla and cinnamon mixture. The result is a meal with a crispy outside and a soft, fluffy inside that will leave your family asking

for seconds. Here is everything you need to make this comforting weekend classic.

INGREDIENTS

- 4 thick slices of brioche or challah bread (day-old bread works best)
- 3 large eggs
- 1/2 cup of whole milk
- 1 teaspoon of vanilla extract
- 1 teaspoon of ground cinnamon
- 1 pinch of salt
- 1 tablespoon of butter
- Maple syrup and fresh fruit for topping

STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS

1. MIX THE CUSTARD

Grab a wide, shallow bowl or a pie dish. Crack the three eggs into the bowl and whisk them gently. Pour in the milk, vanilla extract, ground cinnamon, and a pinch of salt. Whisk everything together until the spices blend evenly into the liquid.

2. HEAT THE SKILLET

Place a large frying pan or griddle on your stove over medium heat. Add the butter to the pan. Let the butter melt completely until it sizzles slightly, spreading it to cover the entire bottom of the pan.

3. DIP THE BREAD

Take one slice of bread and place it into your egg mixture. Let it soak for about five seconds. Flip the bread over and let the other side soak for another

five seconds. You want the bread to absorb the liquid without falling apart.

4. COOK TO GOLDEN PERFECTION

Place the soaked bread gently into your hot skillet. Cook the bread for three to four minutes on the first side. Wait until the bottom turns a rich golden-brown color. Flip the slice and cook the other side for another two to three minutes. If you have a large enough pan, you can cook two or three slices at the same time.

5. SERVE WARM

Move the cooked French toast to a warm plate. Top your warm toast with a generous pour of maple syrup and a handful of fresh berries. Serve the meal immediately while the edges remain perfectly crisp.

This simple recipe gives you a reliable, delicious meal that feels truly special. Enjoy your peaceful morning with a great plate of food and a hot cup of coffee.



BULBS to Blossoms

Spring breathes new life into our home gardens, trading gray winter landscapes for a vibrant mosaic of color. As the ground warms, a diverse array of spring flowers emerges to instantly rejuvenate your outdoor spaces. Adding these early bloomers to your yard boosts curb appeal and creates a welcoming retreat right outside your door.

When we think of classic spring gardens, a few standout favorites come to mind. Daffodils usually lead the charge, offering cheerful yellow and white cups that signal warmer days ahead. Tulips follow closely behind, providing a striking palette ranging from soft pastels to deep, dramatic purples. Above the flowerbeds, cherry blossoms put on a spectacular, albeit brief, show. Their delicate pink and white petals create a breathtaking canopy that transforms any landscape.

To capture this seasonal magic,

careful selection and planting are essential. Choose a sunny spot in your yard, as most spring bulbs and flowering trees need at least six hours of direct sunlight daily. Before planting, take time to loosen the soil and mix in organic compost. This improves drainage and gives new roots a healthy foundation. When you place your bulbs, follow the spacing guidelines on the package to ensure proper air circulation.

Maintaining a thriving garden requires a few simple care habits. Water your plants deeply once a week, especially if rainfall is scarce. Keep a layer of mulch around the base of your plants to lock in moisture and keep invasive weeds away. Finally, remember to snip off fading blooms. This practice prevents the plant from wasting energy on seed production, directing it instead toward storing nutrients for next year's spectacular show.



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Additional tour opportunities are available at www.cds.on.ca/visitus. We look forward to meeting you soon!

Questions?

Please contact our Admissions Team at 905.833.1972 or admissions@cds.on.ca.

CDS offers JK-12 in a co-ed, non-denominational environment located on 100 beautiful acres in King.



Our 89 members of the Class of 2025 received admission offers to some of the top universities across Canada, the U.S. and the world.



The Outdoor Ed program begins in the Junior School and continues through to Senior School, enriching the science and social studies curriculum.



The state-of-the-art Performing Arts Centre enhances our ability to inspire and instruct students in drama and music.



Long-lasting values are established through CDS sports teams, including self-confidence, discipline, sportsmanship and integrity.



Our debaters and public speakers have performed locally, nationally and on the world stage – capturing world championships four times in the last 10 years.



CDS

The Country Day School

EDUCATION WITH BALANCE

CDS QUICK FACTS

829

STUDENTS ENROLLED
IN GRADES JK-12

100

ACRE CAMPUS IN KING

18

AVERAGE CLASS SIZE

89

CDS GRADUATES IN 2025

93%

ONTARIO SCHOLARS

100%

UNIVERSITY ACCEPTANCE
FOR THE CLASS OF 2025

AP

A VARIETY OF
COURSE OFFERINGS AVAILABLE

48

ATHLETIC TEAMS
ACROSS 24 SPORTS

3

DRAMATIC PRODUCTIONS
EACH YEAR

40+

CLUBS AND
EXTRA-CURRICULARS

2,400

ALUMNI WORLDWIDE

OUR VISION

The Country Day School is committed to offering a superior educational experience that is sensitive to the needs of each student, enables learning and equips students for life.