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THE AURORAN

Aurora's Community Newspaper

VOL 28 | NO. 7 | 905-727-3300 — TheAuroran.com — FREE — WEEK OF NOVEMBER 26, 2026



READY TO WORK – Aurora's 2026-2030 Council was formally sworn in last Tuesday night. Pictured here at the reception that followed the November 17 Council inauguration are, from left, Ward 1 Councillor Lauren Hanna, Ward 6 Councillor Harold Kim, Ward 3 Councillor Nikki Alber, Mayor Tom Mrakas, Ward 5 Councillor Jessie Fraser, Ward 4 Councillor Michael Thompson, and Ward 2 Councillor Angela Daust. For more on the Council inaugural, see Pages 13 – 15.
Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger

Mayor looking forward to what new Council "will accomplish together"

Mrakas touts downtown revitalization, opportunities ahead in third Inaugural speech

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Aurora has made "tremendous progress" over the last two terms of Council, and as a new term begins, Mayor Tom Mrakas is "even more excited about what comes next."

Mrakas formally began his third term as Aurora's Mayor on Tuesday, November 17, when he and the 2026-2030 Council were formally inaugurated at a ceremony held at Town Hall.

It was an evening of pomp and circumstance as Mrakas took his seat, alongside Ward 1 Councillor Lauren Hanna, Ward 2 Councillor Angela Daust, Ward 3 Councillor Nikki Alber, Ward 4 Councillor Michael Thompson, Ward 5 Councillor Jessie Fraser, and Ward 6 Councillor Harold Kim.

The evening marked the start of Thompson's fifth term on Council after first being elected in 2010, while Kim begins his fourth term following his successful election in 2014. This is the first term for Hanna, Daust, Alber, and Fraser who each said they were eager to hit the ground running.

"Tonight is a significant moment for Aurora's history. By swearing in the members of Council, we affirm the foundation of our democracy and transform the voices of our residents into leadership," said Town Clerk Anne Kantharajah, who led the meeting until Mrakas took the Oath of Office. "As we begin this new term, let us remember that many around the world do not have the opportunity to participate in

Continued on page 13



SANTA UNDER THE STARS – Aurora's up-and-coming hockey stars turned out in droves for Saturday night's Santa Under the Stars parade. For more on this annual pre-Christmas tradition, see Pages 20 and 21.
Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger


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Longo family makes $1 million contribution to Southlake Health



Members of the Longo Family gathered at Southlake Health to celebrate their $1 million gift in support of Southlake's Regional Cancer Program. From left: Paul Woods, MD, President and CEO, Southlake Health, Brandon Withall, Christina Longo, Joey Longo, Jessica Longo, Bryan Yeatman, and Jennifer Ritter, President and CEO, Southlake Health Foundation.

Photo courtesy of the Southlake Health Foundation

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Clinical trials carried out in Southlake Health's oncology department got a significant financial boost this month with a $1 million gift to the local hospital from the Longo Family Foundation.

On Monday, Southlake Health announced it had received the foundation's grant on November 9, representing the largest philanthropic gift yet from the Foundation to the Newmarket-based hospital.

The gift supports Southlake's HERE is Where Cancer Meets its Match capital campaign, with a specific focus on equipping the hospital with the tools it needs to offer the best cancer care possible close to home.

"Of specific focus for the Longo Family Foundation is next-generation genetic sequencing to deliver even more personalized and precise treatment, and enabling access to clinical trials for patients close to home," said Southlake on the donation and dedication of the Longo Family Foundation Clinical Trials Program in Oncology.

"The communities served by Southlake are the same communities our customers, team members, and their families call home," said Rosanne Longo, Chair of the Longo Family Foundation. "We believe everyone deserves access to exceptional healthcare close to where they live, and we're proud to support Southlake as it continues to advance leading edge cancer care for patients and families. This gift reflects our enduring commitment to the health and wellbeing of the communities that have supported our family for so many years."

The program's inauguration was attended by members of the Southlake and Foundation teams, including medical professionals who know firsthand the impact this donation will have on local healthcare.

"Every day, I have the privilege of caring for patients and families facing one of life's most difficult journeys, so I know firsthand the impact this meaningful gift will have on them," said Dr. Shaqil Kassam, Medical Oncologist at Southlake Health. "Expanding access to innovative treatments and clinical trials opens the door to new options and hope for patients. As a physician, I am deeply grateful for what this investment will mean for the patients and families who place their trust in us."

Added Charissa Cordon, Vice President of Cancer Care at Southlake Health: "Where a person lives should never determine the quality of care they receive. That's why Southlake's Regional Cancer Centre has always been committed to delivering compassionate, leading-edge cancer care close to home. We are deeply grateful to the Longo Family Foundation for this extraordinary gift that will expand access to world-class care and clinical trials while advancing cancer research, genomics and precision medicine. Together, these advances will help improve outcomes and bring the promise of tomorrow's cancer treatments closer to home for patients and families in our communities."

Clinical trials, added Dr. Luca Pisterzi, Director of Research, Innovation, and Clinical Scholarship at Southlake, are "how today's discoveries become tomorrow's standard of care."

"This remarkable investment from the Longo Family Foundation will expand access to oncology clinical trials, ensuring more patients benefit from some of the most promising advances in cancer treatment close to home," said Pisterzi.

Dr. Alisha Kassam, Physician Leader of the Regional Cancer Program, concurred, adding: "Clinical trials play an important role in advancing cancer care and expanding treatment options for patients. The Longo Family Foundation Clinical Trials Program in Oncology represents an important investment in building our capacity to offer patients access to innovative therapies and emerging treatment approaches closer to home, while contributing to the advancement of personalized cancer care."

CMHA's Giving Tuesday aims to expand mental health support for local youth

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

This Tuesday, December 1, marks Giving Tuesday, an opportunity for individuals to support the causes close to their hearts wherever they can – and the Canadian Mental Health Association of York Region and South Simcoe (CMHA-YRSS) remains front of mind for local insurance agent George Rappos.

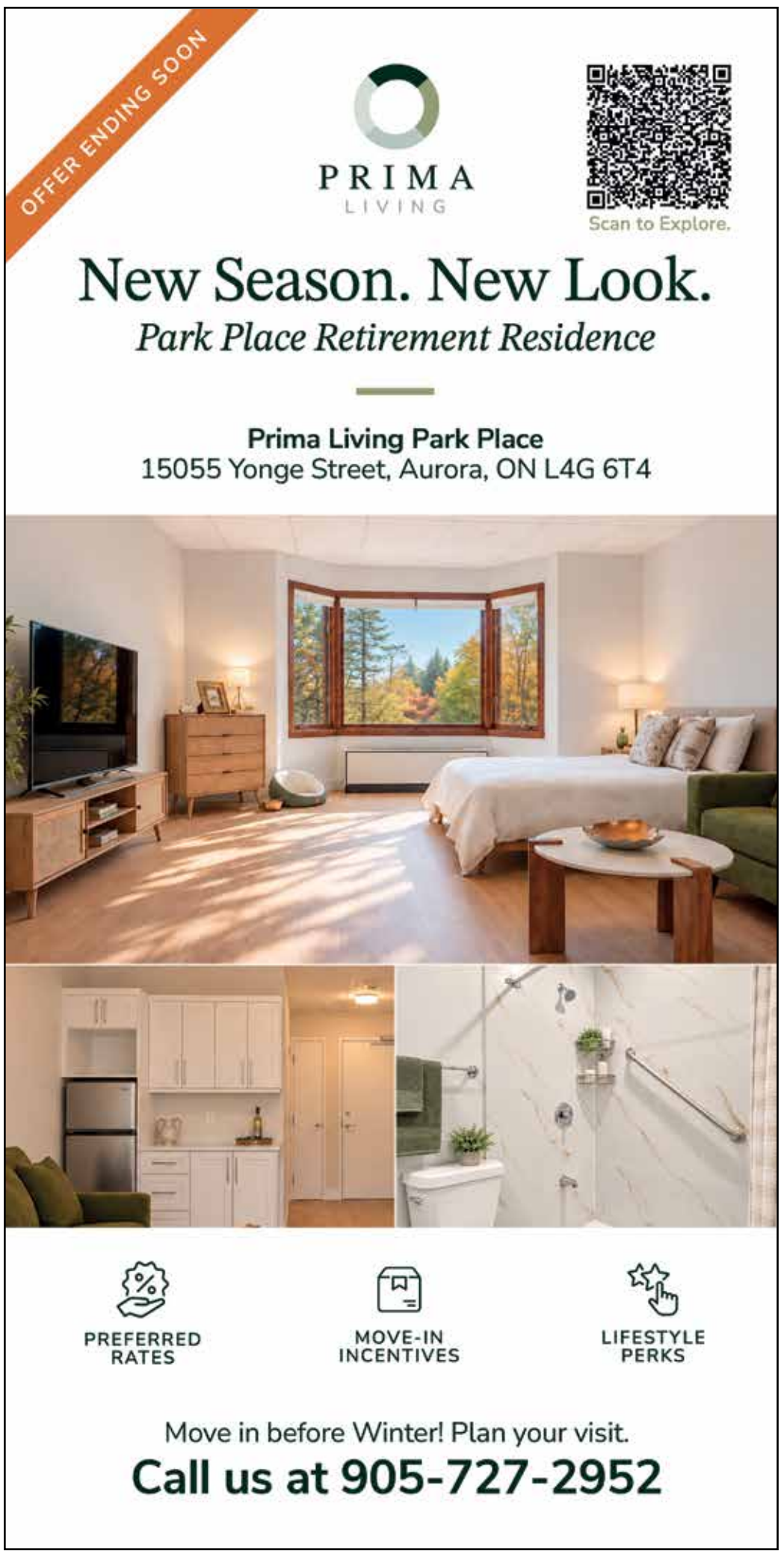
Rappos, an agent with Desdjardins, is once again marking Giving Tuesday by matching donations made to the CMHA-YRSS on December 1 up to $5,000. Rappos' contribution is coupled with a further anonymous donation of $5,000 to the organization.

"Youth in our community are telling us they are feeling stressed and worried about their futures," says Andrew Chung, CEO of the CMHA-YRSS. "And the data tells the same story: more than half of Ontario's students struggle with depression and anxiety, yet one in three said they didn't seek help. That's why this Giving Tuesday matters. When you give locally, you're joining George and our anonymous donor in helping ensure that youth in our neighbourhoods can access mental health support close to come."

According to the CMHA-YRSS, the Giving Tuesday campaign, "Insuring Our Future," has raised more than $100,000 for youth mental health since its inception, all through community donations.

"I'm a firm believer that good youth mental health is essential to

Continued on page 22





LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Region marks National Housing Day – November 22

On November 22, York Region recognizes National Housing Day by acknowledging the contributions of non-profit housing providers and community partners who help residents access safe, affordable housing. National Housing Day is an opportunity to acknowledge the vital role these organizations play in delivering, maintaining and preserving affordable homes and to recognize the partnerships that help ensure housing remains accessible for York Region residents.

York Region manages a community housing system of more than 7,000 units across the Region, including almost 4,000 units operated by 42 non-profit and co-operative housing providers and over 3,000 units owned by Housing York Inc. Together, these units help residents access safe and affordable housing in their communities.

Housing affordability remains a significant challenge in York Region and demand for housing and homelessness services continues to grow. To help address this need, the approved 2026 Capital Budget includes $473 million over 10 years for community housing, emergency housing and transitional housing initiatives. This investment will support the delivery of approximately 580 new community housing units, including new Housing York Inc. developments and approximately 244 new and replacement emergency and transitional housing units.

The budget also advances planning and design work for an additional 765 community housing units to support future growth and improve housing affordability. York Region is helping to increase supply by continuing to seek funding support from other levels of government to accelerate the delivery of new homes, including units enabled through the Community Housing Supply Grant Program and other partnerships.

Addressing housing affordability requires collaboration across the non-profit and private sectors. To support new community housing development, York Region is implementing the new Housing Affordability Resource Program to oversee and administer the Non-Profit Pre-Development Support Program to support partners with streamlined capital investment, pre-development support and incentives.

Expanding affordable housing and improving housing stability are key priorities for the Region, outlined in the 2026 to 2035 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan and Housing York Inc.'s 2025 to 2028 Strategic Plan.

York Region continues to invest in housing solutions while calling on provincial and federal partners to support a shared funding approach and sustained investment in emergency, transitional, affordable and community housing. Continued funding for both new housing development and the renewal of existing housing stock is essential to preserving affordable homes and reducing long-term pressures on homelessness, health care and other social services.

Region of York

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

Machell's Corners



Black Friday Palate Cleansers



BROCK'S BANTER

Brock Weir

Our American cousins are getting ready to sit down and talk turkey this weekend.

It's not a holiday or observance that regularly features on my radar, being Canadian.

The timing of the holiday, of course, is steeped in history, but it always seemed a bit strange to me to have such a huge gastronomic occasion so close to Christmas and all the other holidays and observances that fill up this time of year almost shoulder-to-shoulder lest the calendar run out for another year. I can hardly begrudge them the feast, however, as our slightly different Thanksgiving meal is one of my favourite things to tuck into. That said, there's some benefit to spacing out these table-groaning banquets throughout the fall – that way, there's always something to look forward to.

While I hope everyone celebrating the observance has a great time – and I wish them the best of luck in making it through the around-the-table conversation unscathed given the results of the United States mid-terms earlier this month – it often feels like we as Canadians get caught in the thick of it, whether we want to or not.

Maybe you have family, friends, or coworkers with American roots and much of the first half of this week has been dominated by travel anxiety in the quest to get home and give thanks – the anxiety not helped by breathless reports of airport delays at the point of your destination.

Maybe they simply like the spectacle of the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, with its unique cavalcade of inflatable floats that touch upon the current pop culture zeitgeist as well as time-tested favourites that rarely fail to impart a feeling of comfort, nostalgia, or just plain fun.

Heck, maybe you're a Canadian who counts down to a holiday we don't even celebrate just to find a great deal – or, at the very least, a deal that's touted to be great – on that big ticket item you've been pining for.

Here, the American Thanksgiving holiday seems almost inescapable as more and more Canadian businesses hop on the Black Friday bandwagon to bring in more customers, providing a distinct challenge to the mayhem that used to be confined on our side of the border to Boxing Day – and, more recently, Boxing Week – sales.

While we're not yet at a point where Boxing Week will yield to a full-on Boxing Month, it seems like an inevitability at this point.

I like a good deal as much as the next guy, but the Black Friday and Boxing Day bus is never one I've hopped on. A few weak moments have happened over the years, such as the time I went to a local grocery store to get a sandwich on my lunch hour, only to come back sans sandwich with a flat screen TV, but I don't begrudge our businesses from exploring any opportunity for more sales or bringing more cash into their coffers.

Those of us who don't regularly indulge in mass consumerism might find themselves asking, "Do we really need a Black Friday in Canada?" or "Do we really need a Cyber Monday as soon as the dust settles on Black Friday to pick meat from the bones of whatever was left over from the weekend?" or, when the spoils arrive on your doorstep – if porch pirates don't get there first – "Did you really think this through?"

But there are also a few opportunities to do something entirely different this season.

The winter holidays are just around the corner and excitement is already building in our communities with dozens of organizations, non-profits, schools, and more coming together to host Christmas and Holiday Markets. While some vendors at these affairs might come from further afield, chances are what you find there not only supports local small business owners but could potentially further the creativity of local "makers."

We're also fortunate enough to have plenty of opportunities in our communities to meet these makers at year-round galleries, pop-up markets and, when the weather is warmer, local farmers' markets and artisan fairs.

The best part of all these opportunities? The tactile experience of shopping and finding the product that is just right for you. If you get a great Black Friday deal on a cool-looking sweater, only to find upon arrival sleeves of wildly different lengths, a thread count not far removed from cheesecloth, and a return policy requiring you to send it back overseas at your expense, at a cost six-times higher than the shirt itself, thus negating any Black Friday deal…

Shopping local at this time of year, and supporting local businesses, entrepreneurs, and creatives, is a great way to ensure your purchasing power stays in the community, fostering another kind of circular economy.

Yet there are more ways still to ensure your purchasing power stays here at home.

Black Friday may be, for better or worse, an American import, but so too is Giving Tuesday. Something of a palate-cleanser, the movement began in New York City in 2012 as a "global generosity movement unleashing the power of people and organizations to transform their communities and the world."

It is here at the community level where we see the impact of Giving Tuesday – December 1 this year – really at work.

The Canadian Mental Health Association of York Region and South Simcoe, for instance, is encouraging people to consider their organization as a place to give, with each dollar received during this time dedicated to supporting and enhancing youth mental health programs.

Also on the health front, Southlake Health has focused their potential Giving Tuesday intake on advancing diagnostic imaging and intervention at the hospital, including X-ray machines, a CT scanner, ultrasound technology, interventional radiology equipment, fluoroscopy equipment, and bone mineral densitometry.

"Diagnostic imaging is often the first step on a patient's journey to a diagnosis, treatment plan, and recovery," says the Southlake Health Foundation. "Simply put: if we can't see it, we can't treat it. These technologies touch nearly every patient journey at Southlake, helping care teams diagnose sooner, intervene earlier, and provide leading edge care close to home.

"This giving Tuesday, help deliver something priceless: Answers. Treatment. Hope. Together, we can help more patients and families in our communities get the care they need, when they need it most."

Over at Headwaters Health Care, the Foundation is undoubtedly hoping this year's Giving Tuesday contributions exceed the community's record-busting efforts last year, with $143,882 raised on the day, with matching contributions bringing the total to $287,764. Remarkable!

Black Friday is here to stay, but if you have money burning a hole in your pocket at this time of year, take a moment to consider where it is best spent and what might keep your money working for you and those you love.

Southlake is right in that, "if we can't see it, we can't treat it." But, by the same token, if we can't see our dollars working locally, we can't reap the rewards.

A shirt bought online in this era of fast fashion might last two or three years, but the services we have the chance to support on Tuesday, December 1, can have an impact that is much longer-lasting.

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AURORA MUSEUM & ARCHIVES | HISTORY THRIVES ON PAGE 5 WITH THE AURORA MUSEUM & ARCHIVES

AWESOME ARTIFACT ALERT

All Cork and No Play



While corked bottles are now only used for wine and similar products, they were much more ubiquitous in many commercial items up through the first half of the 20th century. These two corkscrews demonstrate a couple different approaches to the removal of said corks. On the left is a simple ring-pull corkscrew (86.20.3), provided as a promotional item by the W.T. Rawleigh company, which supplied a huge variety of household products – many sealed with corks – to consumers in the early 20th century. The text reads: "Compliments of the Rawleigh Man", which was their primary marketing campaign promoting their team of traveling salesmen. The other corkscrew (997.37.3) is in a more familiar form, but with a peculiar spring-loaded design based on an 1883 German patent. The swing-arm version we know well was not developed until the 1930s. The image below shows these two to scale – in contextus veritas!



DIALOGUE WITH DAWN

By Dawn Gallagher Murphy
MPP, Newmarket-Aurora

As we continue working to protect Ontario's economy and build opportunities for the future, our government's Fall Economic Statement reinforces our commitment to supporting workers, strengthening businesses and keeping Ontario competitive.

During my remarks in the Legislature, I highlighted the economic challenges facing our province, particularly the uncertainty surrounding U.S. tariffs, and the actions we are taking to respond.

Since April 2025, our government has made nearly $30 billion in tariff relief and supports available to workers and businesses. Through the new $8.7 billion Canada-Ontario Action Plan, we are strengthening key sectors, including steel, automotive and critical minerals, while preparing Ontario to compete in emerging industries such as advanced manufacturing, defence and energy.

Here in Newmarket–Aurora, we are seeing how these investments translate into real opportunities for local businesses and workers. Companies like Bramden Precision and Exco Engineering have benefited from the Ontario Together Trade Fund, helping them modernize their operations, strengthen domestic supply chains, protect existing jobs and create new opportunities. These investments demonstrate why it is so important to support Ontario businesses, encourage innovation and ensure our local industries remain competitive.

Strong infrastructure also starts with a skilled and well-trained workforce. I was pleased to highlight an investment of more than $1.5 million through Ontario's Skills Development Fund Training Stream, supporting Bird Infrastructure Ltd., right here in Newmarket. This investment will help train 140 workers and jobseekers through the company's Integrated Craftsmanship and Complex Project Training Program. With hands-on training in mechanical craftsmanship, rigging and hoisting, as well as leadership and mentorship, participants will be better equipped to pursue rewarding careers in skilled trades. It is encouraging to see a Newmarket-based company helping strengthen Ontario's construction workforce while creating valuable opportunities for people in our community.

Supporting strong communities also means investing in the organizations that make a difference in people's lives. I was pleased to highlight $520,700 in Ontario Trillium Foundation funding for the Women's Centre of York Region. Through two grants, the Centre is expanding programs that support women, youth and families. This includes a $100,000 Seed grant supporting a roommate-matching initiative to help women experiencing abuse access safer housing and greater financial stability, as well as a three-year $420,700 Grow grant to expand the Ripple Project. This project helps young people recognize unhealthy relationship behaviours, build self-esteem and develop positive connections.

Community organizations like the Women's Centre play an important role in strengthening our communities, and I am proud to see these investments supporting their important work.

It was also wonderful to join the Santa Claus parades in Newmarket and Aurora this past weekend and help kick off the holiday spirit across our community. Seeing the excitement and smiles on the children's faces is always a special reminder of what makes this time of year so meaningful. As we approach the holiday season, I encourage everyone to explore the many Christmas markets and local shopping opportunities throughout Newmarket–Aurora. Whether you are looking for something unique, handmade or proudly Canadian, shopping local is a wonderful way to support our small businesses, local jobs and community economy. A gift made in Canada is more than just a gift; it is also an investment in the people and businesses that make our communities thrive.

Wishing everyone a wonderful start to the holiday season!



INSIDE AURORA

Scott Johnston

Canopy Conundrum

When it comes to trees, autumn is a time of evolving perspectives in Aurora.

Any time you're out for a walk or drive you can really appreciate the effort that residents put into planting and maintaining the trees on their properties, and that Town staff put into the ones standing guard over our boulevards, parks and other green spaces.

It's no wonder that in the past ten years Aurora's tree cover has increased from 28% to 34%, en route to our eventual goal of 40%.

There's no better time to appreciate this than the fall, when the leaves turn.

Of course, as the paraphrased saying goes, what's up must come down. The red, gold and yellow leaves that look terrific in the trees still manage to be pretty when on the ground, but disposing of them is far less enjoyable.

It's truly amazing how many we end up dealing with. A single large deciduous tree can have many tens of thousands of leaves. And Aurora has over two million trees, with more being planted each year. Even factoring in that many are conifers, that's still a daunting amount of foliage raining down on our Town each year.

No wonder people seem to be raking, leaf blowing or both, 24/7 through October and November.

Of course, we don't have to rake. There's a school of thought that fallen leaves should just be left to rot and release their nutrients back into the ecosystem. That certainly seems to have worked in nature for millions of years, but depending on the scale of leaf fall, it can be a problem on private property.

There are several large trees on and around our property, and while I collect well over 40 bags of leaves every year, I can never get them all. One year, we had an early snowfall before I could do any raking, so I decided to just let decomposition take care of them.

Perhaps with enough time, or if there weren't so many of them, this might have worked. But in the spring when the snow melted, it revealed a thick, soggy biomass completely covering our lawn, which proved too much for the local decomposers, and through which no sunlight could penetrate. For the sake of our grass, which must have been asking where the sun had gone, I eventually had to rake it all up.

So much for that experiment.

Since bylaws forbid us from burning our leaves like many folks did in the "good old days", we're left with raking. Based on the number of yard waste bags out on curbs this time of year, we're all getting a lot of fresh air and exercise.

Kudos to the folks that pick them up every two weeks and to the Town staff who regularly sweep the streets to ensure the catch basins stay clear.

As for bag pickup, one thing that to me always seems a bit premature is the last scheduled day of pickup each year, which in the case of 2026 was last week. I was curious to see if the bags still being put out at the curb across Town would be there in April next year when collection begins again. Then, fortunately for these folks, pickup was extended to the first week of December.

As for our yard, despite all my raking there are still some leaves left out there.

But at least it's a manageable amount for the fungi, insects, worms and nature's other decomposers to deal with over the next several months.

Christmas Market

I'll have a table at the Town's Christmas Market on Friday, November 27 from 5-8:30 pm. If you're interested in one of my cartoon greeting cards, a signed book, or just want to say 'hi', feel free to drop by.

Feel free to e-mail Scott at:
machellscorners@gmail.com

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Stop Ford's "environmental power grab," says Foundation

Bill 140 would take away the tools we've used for decades to protect nature.

Who here remembers the Greenbelt scandal?

It was a public notice posted on Ontario's Environmental Registry that first exposed Doug Ford's plan to carve out parts of the Greenbelt for development.

Now, Ontario is moving to scrap the Registry for good. That means more government decisions made behind closed doors, less public scrutiny, and next to zero accountability.

Bill 140, introduced last week, would completely gut the Environmental Bill of Rights – and that's not even being dramatic.

The bill would eliminate mandatory public notices and consultation requirements for a wide range of environmental laws and policies, and would take away your right to appeal environmental approvals, review environmental laws, or request investigations into environmental offences.

Basically, if Bill 140 existed five years ago, we never would have discovered (and stopped!) Ford's plans to open up the Greenbelt. If Bill 140 passes, you can be sure there will be similar deals made behind closed doors.

For more than 30 years, Ontario's Environmental Bill of Rights gave people the power to protect the nature in their communities. Don't let Doug Ford strip those powers away.

We may disagree on certain policies, but everyone has the right to know about and speak out on decisions that could threaten their health and environment.

Now. Not after the damage is done.

Tell Premier Ford and your MPP to stop Bill 140 and protect Ontario's environmental rights.

David Suzuki Foundation

Region seeking early childhood educators

Early learning and child care (ELCC) professionals play an integral role in supporting the heathy development of young children. They are also the heart of our communities by providing quality care for children and families in licensed centre and home-based child care settings, as well as in EarlyON Child and Family Programs in York Region.

Early childhood educators (ECEs) are committed to supporting children's development and lifelong learning while supporting the well-being of families and parents. We celebrate the important role they play in our communities each and every day.

York Region recognizes that there is a need for more educators in the field and is encouraging students, newcomers and individuals looking for a change in career to consider becoming an ECE. Working as an ECE is an active and creative career where you can enrich and inspire young minds, support early development and make a meaningful difference in the lives of children and their families.

In addition to careers, mentorship and apprenticeship opportunities are also available.

More information about opportunities, training and supports available to those looking to join the early learning and child care profession is available at york.ca/EarlyLearning.

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Giving Shop is five-year success story for Oakridge's Fashions

100 per cent of proceeds from initiative benefit four York Region charities

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER



The team at the Alzheimer Society of York Region had a special evening to peruse Oakridge's Fashions' Giving Shop last week. The Society is one of four community non-profits chosen by store owner Deb Clark, far right, to share in the Giving Shop's proceeds this year. **Auroran photo by Brock Weir**

Staff members and supporters of the Alzheimer Society of York Region had the chance to check a few items off their Christmas shopping lists last week a little early as they had a special afternoon to peruse The Giving Shop.

An annual festive feature at Oakridge's Fashions, the popular boutique in Aurora's historic downtown core, the Giving Shop is now entering its fifth season of offering curated gifts at affordable price points for just about everyone on your list – with 100 per cent of the proceeds from Giving Shop sales going directly to local charities and non-profits.

Sharing in the proceeds this year are the Alzheimer Society, CHATS (Community & Home Assistance to Seniors), the Rose of Sharon Services for Young Mothers, and Victim Services of York Region.

As Oakridge's owner Deborah Clark watched members of the Society browse the Giving Shop last Tuesday evening, one of a series of special shopping nights designated for each beneficiary organization, she was filled with both pride and joy that the in-store initiative has gone from strength to strength.

"There are so many charitable organizations supporting the community we all live in. Aren't we lucky?" says Clark. "We like to give lots of different organizations the support to share in the philanthropic spirit of giving. Every year that goes by, more and more people come out knowing about the Giving Shop, to get some 'giftables' to people they know and love, and knowing that they're supporting the community. There's nothing whatsoever for me, for Oakridge's, other than the joy of knowing the good that it does – and, of course, we want more and more people to know about it as we want to grow it and expand it."

Among the highlights in The Giving Shop this year are items to tickle your tastebuds, items such as sparkly initial Christmas ornaments, gloves – "everything from what I call 'cheap and cheerful' to super deluxe, because who doesn't love a beautiful new pair of gloves?' and "things for the garden, things for the kitchen, things for the golfer, things for the fashionista."

All, she says, with a focus on sourcing products from Canada before looking afar.

Another product pairing that has proved popular over the years in the Giving Shop is an ever-growing line of felted Christmas ornaments, shaped like mice and sourced from Quebec, which has inspired Clark to write a series of children's books based on the cute critters.

"I'm in love with the little children's books and this year is my favourite book of all five years; it's called Rosie Belongs, and it's about a little mouse that comes in the shipment to Oakridge's this year. She's extraordinarily shy because she has quite a big nose. She's been teased about this and she's quite frightened about how she will ever belong. Her journey here is a story for children on how we needn't worry all the time about belonging and also about how to be a good friend for someone who feels a little bit different.

"Making a story about numbers of [the mice] opens it up to be more than a cute ornament; it opens it up to be a sweet gift to a child because it comes with a storybook and they can hold that character that's in the storybook and it becomes a repeat annual wish. We do have children that come in with their parents and grandparents now asking for the new book. I love that – more joy!"

This joy was felt by members of the Society last week.

Yolanda Mol Amelink, Director of Philanthropy for the Alzheimer Society of York Region, said she and their group were "extraordinary grateful" for Clark and the Oakridge's team for "being such great community partners and for supporting so many social causes in Aurora, not just ours."

"We really appreciate Deborah's heart for what we do and for supporting it," she said. "[Funds from The Giving Shop] will help us deliver programs and services, as well as raise awareness of the programs are available for local families who need our support.

"The numbers of people that are impacted by the disease and are being diagnosed in Aurora is definitely growing. Unfortunately, the funds available to run programs are not growing at the same rate and therefore we need community partners like Deborah to help deliver programs like caregiver support groups, counselling, health care navigation services, respite programs for our community. It goes a long way to have community partners who help us meet our operating budget."

While this might be a milestone year for The Giving Shop, Clark says she doesn't want to "jinx" the totals this year by throwing out a fundraising goal, but says "the sky is the limit" for how much she would like to raise for the four causes.

"I'm hoping the reason The Giving Shop has staying power is maybe we got some things right. We thought that a lot of us want to buy a little something for many people, and then there's a price point, a budget, and oftentimes those little somethings are all over York Region," says Clark. "Our concept was if we put a lot of different somethings in one place that appeal to a gardener, a golfer, a this, a that, that maybe that's a great customer service as well as a community service.

"I think the concept works because it's, quite frankly, a bit practical and people can knock a lot of things off their list. A lot of times we have a customer come in and they're going to a little seasonal gathering and they want to quickly get something for the hostess. We think that that is working, that practical piece of it, and it only strengthened and endured all the more because they know that as they buy something for someone they love, they're buying something for someone they don't know at all.

"Is that not the spirit of the holiday season? It just brings out the best and it's a great feeling for all of us."

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Luca Ciminelli, CIM

YOUR EMPTY DECADE

There is a stretch of years in most retirements that almost nobody plans for, and it is the most valuable planning window you will ever have.

It runs roughly from 60 to 71. Employment income has stopped, or slowed. CPP and Old Age Security may not have started yet, and if they have, they are modest. The RRSP has not yet been converted to a RRIF, so nothing is forcing money out of it. For many households, taxable income during these years is the lowest it has been since their twenties and the lowest it will be again.

Most people treat this as good news and leave it alone. That is the expensive part.

Here is why. Your RRSP is not a savings account. It is a deferred tax bill, and the deferral ends on a schedule you do not control. In the year you turn 71 the RRSP must be converted to a RRIF, and from 72 onward a minimum percentage comes out every year whether you need it or not. That minimum starts at about 5.4 percent and climbs with age. It is taxable income, it stacks on top of CPP and OAS, and it never stops.

Consider someone who retires at 62 with $600,000 in an RRSP and leaves it untouched. Growing at a modest rate, it might be near $900,000 by the time the RRIF begins. The minimum withdrawal in the first full year would be roughly $49,000, arriving alongside CPP and OAS. Suddenly a person who spent a decade in the lowest tax bracket is in a much higher one, with no way back, for the rest of their life.

Now consider the alternative. Starting at 62, they withdraw $40,000 a year from the RRSP. In Ontario in 2026, income at that level attracts a combined marginal rate of about 19 percent, compared with roughly 30 percent once income passes $58,523. The withdrawals are not necessarily spent. They can be used to fund living costs that would otherwise come from a non-registered account, or moved into a TFSA where they grow tax-free and never show up as income again.

Same money. Different lifetime tax bill, often by a wide margin.

There is a second effect worth understanding. Old Age Security is clawed back once net income exceeds $95,323 in 2026, at a rate of 15 cents on the dollar. Large forced RRIF withdrawals in your seventies are one of the most common ways people cross that line without realizing it. Reducing the registered balance in your sixties reduces the minimums later, which protects a benefit you spent forty years qualifying for.

None of this argues for emptying the RRSP, and done carelessly the strategy backfires. Withdraw too much in a single year and you pay tax at a higher rate than you would have later, which is the mistake in reverse. Withholding tax applies at source. If you are receiving the Guaranteed Income Supplement, an extra withdrawal can cost more in lost benefits than it saves in tax. The point is not to drain the account. It is to use the lower brackets deliberately rather than letting them go unused for ten years and then paying for it.

The decade is called empty because the income is low. It is not empty of decisions. Every year that passes without one is a year of unused room that does not carry forward.

What strikes me is who tends to get caught by this. It is rarely the people who have undersaved. It is the disciplined ones, the savers who maxed the RRSP every year and never touched it, who open a notice at 72 and find that the diligence itself created the problem. By then the options have narrowed considerably. At age 62 they have not.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Speak with a Financial Advisor to explore whether your retirement withdrawal strategy could help reduce your lifetime tax bill.

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Photo by Max Harlynking

Sources

- 2026 federal and Ontario brackets and combined marginal rates
- Ontario combined marginal rates 2026
- CPP and OAS maximum benefit amounts, October to December 2026, including the OAS repayment range

Disclaimer - This article is for informational purposes only and is not to be construed as advice. Individual circumstances may vary. Luca Ciminelli is an OSC registered Portfolio Manager at Optimize Asset Management.

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Aurora CNX aims to help entrepreneurs follow journey from idea to creation

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER



The principals behind Audacity North were joined on stage by Aurora Mayor Tom Mrakas, Stouffville Mayor Iain Lovatt, and representatives from York University and the Schulich School of Business at Thursday's Aurora CNX event. **Auroran photo by Brock Weir**

There can be a long stretch of time between having a good idea and a flourishing business to call your own – and local entrepreneurs came together at Aurora Town Square last week to learn more about "the gap in between."

The Town of Aurora held its second-annual Aurora CNX event on Thursday, November 19.

Dozens of people filled Town Square's reception hall for the event where Audacity North, a local success story between the Town of Aurora and Whitchurch-Stouffville took centre-stage.

"Audacity North is a med-tech and life-sciences hub right here in Aurora and Stouffville built to get founders at every stage from first idea to global market all in one place," said Keith Loo, founder of Skinopathy, and co-founder of Audacity North alongside Garry Lee of Aurora's Megalab. "To see why that matters, let me start with what we're already good at: Canadian researchers gave the world insulin, stem cells, and what Botox could do for the frown lines on your face. There's a long stretch between a discovery and a product, between a prototype and a patent, and between a good idea and a company that grows up in Canada. I call that the 'ground in-between' and, for most founders, it's mostly empty. I know that ground because I've had to cross it."

Once he had the idea for Skinopathy, an AI company that builds medical AI for skin and wound care, Loo says in order to grow he had to go abroad – 13 cities in nine countries. The "audacious" idea for Audacity North, he said, was to connect all these players and provide these opportunities close to home.

That, indeed, is the very idea behind Aurora CNX as well.

"CNX is a space where ideas are challenged, refined, and strengthened through real-life, in-person conversations with industry leaders and fellow changemakers," said Tracy Smith, founder of the Aurora-based Kitchen Table CEOs, who serves as Chair of Aurora's Economic Development Corporation (AEDC). "It's my absolute honour to now have the privilege of being involved in groups like AEDC and events like tonight that have the power and the influence to help shape an exciting, dynamic, and robust future for Aurora, for all of our communities, and for all of us.

"When you look up the word 'Audacious'… you will find the following definitions: A fearless spirit. Bravery. Confidence. The willingness to try something ambitious and unconventional. A willingness to take bold risks. In essence, to boldly go where no one has gone before. I want all of us to think about that for a moment. The willingness to try something ambitious. A willingness to take bold risks and to boldly go where no one has gone before. Like many entrepreneurs, business owners, and thought leaders in this room, this is the perspective we have to take if we want to create something new, if we want to change, if we want to create a shift away from what's expected, and lean into what's possible. The other definition of 'audacity' is a disregard for normal restraints, rules, or social conventions. Looked at from a positive angle, this means not necessarily following the person in front of you. Not necessarily doing things the way everyone else does, just because that's the way it's always been done. No, to be audacious, to have audacity, means to forge ahead, to ask questions, to challenge, and to create a new pathway forward, one where you might be the first person walking it. Brave and tough stuff."

These themes were also touched upon by Mayor Tom Mrakas, who was joined at the event by many of his Council colleagues, as well as his counterpart from Whitchurch-Stouffville, Mayor Ian Lovatt.

"Aurora CNX is all about connection, providing an opportunity for entrepreneurs, researchers, and public institutions to share their knowledge, expertise, and real-world experience," said Mayor Mrakas. "I want to thank our ECDEV team, as well as the Aurora Economic Development Corporation, for their hard work to make today happen…. We're in a moment of massive technology transformation that is reshaping industries, jobs, and the entire economy. It's an incredibly exciting time, creating new opportunities for a lot of people. But there's also uncertainty, and some profound questions about how we responsibly use technology so that it benefits everyone. That's precisely why Aurora CNX matters.

"[Audacity North] will be a place where entrepreneurs can work alongside leading researchers and industry experts to develop new technologies, test their ideas, and bring them to the market. It's an ambitious project that has the full support of the Town of Aurora and the Town of Stouffville. And I'm incredibly proud that it's being led by Keith Loo and Garry Lee, two of Aurora's biggest success stories. Audacity North, along with the work that many of you are already doing, shows that innovation won't be isolated in a few major cities, and that new businesses can grow and develop right here in Aurora, right here in York Region. This matters so much to communities like ours, because we all know that attracting new investment means more high-quality jobs, more customers for existing businesses, and more opportunities for our residents. And that's ultimately a fundamental part of how you build dynamic and resilient communities where people and families thrive."

The "ground in between" isn't always a dynamic place, and that's where Loo said Audacity North steps in, answering the question. "What if the ground in between is an actual place?"

"Audacity North begins at Megalab's headquarters in Aurora. That's where our programming starts, in a working, accredited testing lab with a team that works with companies every day," said Loo, touting Audacity North's partnerships with York University's Y-Space, the Schulich School of Business and more. "A founder can put their product through electrical, safety, environmental, and medical testing it has to pass before it can sell. And Megalab is also where AI and cybersecurity come in, which is where a lot of the opportunity now is for anyone building connected or AI-driven health technology.

"In 2027, that's where Schulich and York programming will begin, too," noted Loo, adding a driving force behind the idea for Audacity North was his experience with his son, Logan, who was born with an extremely rare genetic condition that took years to properly diagnose here at home. "There are 35 people in the world known to have it. With numbers that small, it's really hard to study, and it's hard to fund. That's not neglect. It's arithmetic. At the centre of Audacity North, we're building the Logan Institute for Rare Disease Research to help families like ours, and it sets one rule for everyone in this building: If a company here can't say whose life it changes, it's in the wrong. So that's Audacity North, a working lab, Schulich and York programming, a rare disease research institute, every stage a founder needs, all in one place.

"Founders shouldn't have to build, or be the ground in between. So, we're going to build it here, for the next founder."

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Eco Guardian encourages local giving with Be a Santa for Seniors

Gifts being accepted through December 7

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

The holiday season is a time of giving – and for many people in the community, it's not about the big gestures, but rather the simple comforts that can help make the season merry and bright.

That's the idea behind Be a Santa for Seniors, an initiative being spearheaded locally once again by the Aurora-based Eco Guardian.

Located at 275 Addison Hall Circle, Unit 2, in Aurora's northeast quadrant, Eco Guardian invites members of the community to visit their new facilities between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. to peruse their Christmas trees, which is loaded with ornaments each bearing a special gift requests from seniors in local seniors' residences, and choose a wish to grant.

Just stop in and ask for Jeff or Katrina.

"Eco Guardian Inc. invites community members to help brighten the holidays for residents at Eagle Terrace and MacKenzie House in Newmarket through its annual Santa for Seniors initiative," says the company. "Recently, Eco Guardian began manufacturing compostable paper cups and bowls in Aurora. By bringing the manufacturing of these products to Canada, we are creating local jobs and investing in the community we call home. Santa for Seniors is another way we are bringing that commitment to life. Everyone is welcome to participate. If you are looking for a meaningful way to give directly to a local cause this Christmas, we would love to hear from you."

Participants can drop their donations off to Eco Guardians through December 7 and each item received will be delivered to the homes by Santa Claus during their Christmas celebrations.

Helping Santa make his deliveries on these special days will be Eco Guardian's Jeff Rushton, Eco Guardian's Product Specialist & NPD Coordinator.

Rushton says the initiative was founded by company president Anil Abrol and his wife, Nisha Abrol, to lend the community a helping hand. The initiative, he said, grew along with the company, with more community support rolling in each season.

"A lot of the gift requests are extremely basic – a lot of stuff people who are not in a residence would consider almost a necessity. Some of them are just asking for things as simple as a pair of slippers or some fuzzy socks, maybe a scarf or a blanket, or even shampoo and conditioner, and a special unscented skin cream," says Rushton. "They'll sometimes ask for something like a Pizza Pizza gift card and six-pack of ginger ales. All relatively easy-to-accommodate requests, but our company will also provide a little something for each individual. Last year, we did really high-quality hoodies after getting all the sizes for [for the residents] and this year I think we're doing blankets again along with shower caddies with shampoo and conditioner.

"Our doors are open to everyone and anyone, so they can just walk in, the tree is right there at the front, and people just usually look around at whatever ornaments they want to select, write their name, phone number, and email on them, and they have until December 7 this year to return the gifts to us. Everything has to be unwrapped just so we can verify the contents.

"I just think that the average person spends what these people are asking for on things that are not even significant or don't even matter to them that much. They might buy a new shirt and wear it once, they might buy a hat, wear it once and throw it in the closet. These small gifts just absolutely make the world of difference to the people who are in these facilities. There are people who say, 'I haven't had anyone visit us' or 'haven't had a Christmas.' The first time we went there was there was people who said 'I never got anything for Christmas the last five years or haven't seen my family in 10 years.' It's a very small thing for the average person, but it completely changes their mood, their energy, their feelings. It has a much bigger impact on the other side than the minimal time you spend to go find a blanket or a sweater that they're asking for."



FESTIVE FLOWERS – Newmarket's Pickering College threw open its doors on Saturday for its annual Holiday Market. This year, the event was designed to impart a "Santa's Village" theme and Doris and Allison had a number of floral options for the holiday dinner table.

Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger



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Music from the Silver Screen helps polish Silver Bells of Christmas Market's second weekend

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Aurora's annual Christmas Market opens at Town Square this Friday, November 27, with the official lighting of the Town's Christmas Tree. It signals the start of a busy weekend at the Market, but there is plenty of additional festive fun to be had when the event returns for its second of two weekends December 4 – 6.

The second weekend will get off to a sizzling start on Friday, December 4, when NorthFire Circus takes over the outdoor square from 6 – 6.30 with their "unique and engaging choreographed fire juggling and fire dancing."

Cool down from the blaze inside when The Coldplay Show takes over the Performance Hall at 6.30 p.m.

"Experience the music and energy of Coldplay with The Coldplay Show, one of the most authentic tribute performances on tour today," say organizers. "Featuring beloved hits like Yellow, Clocks, Fix You, Paradise, and A Sky Full of Stars, this spectacular production combines outstanding musicianship with immersive visual effects for an unforgettable experience."

Rounding out the evening, which will include dozens of vendors stationed both indoors and outdoors, will be photos with Santa from 6 – 7.30 p.m., a Silent Dance Party in Addison Hall Dance Studio from 6.30 – 8.30 p.m., and an encore performance from NorthFire Circus from 7.30 – 8 p.m.

The Christmas season might be known for Silver Bells, but the second Saturday of the Aurora Christmas Market will have a theme that's decidedly more Silver Screen when the Aurora Community Band presents A Hans Zimmer Christmas on December 5 at 3 p.m. An encore performance is set for 7 p.m. Both performances will take place in the Aurora Town Square Performance Hall.

"Experience the magic of the movies – wrapped in holiday cheer," say organizers. "From the soaring themes of Batman: The Dark Knight Rises, Pirates of the Caribbean, and Gladiator, join the Aurora Community Band for a festive night of legendary film scores and seasonal spirit."

The seasonal spirit will be imbued with warmth outside when NorthFire Circus returns for two performances at 6 p.m. and 7.30 p.m., offering a new show.

"Turn up the holiday excitement with NorthFire Circus's Christmas Duo Fire Show," say organizers. "Set to fun, upbeat pop music, this festive performance combines dazzling fire artistry with breathtaking aerial moments featuring our amazing aerialist, Elizabeth from Artists' Play. With playful energy, spectacular skills, and plenty of Christmas cheer, this family-friendly show brings warmth and wonder to your holiday celebration."

Fire gives way to nostalgia on Sunday, December 6, with two performances from Kiki Totally Outrageous at 6 p.m., and again at 7.30 p.m.

"This all-80s show is sure to keep you dancing, smiling and walking on sunshine," says the Town. "Come watch as Kiki does all her best hula-hoops, contortion, and acrobatics."

Santa will also be back for the second Saturday and Sunday of the Market, and will be joined on Saturday by Mrs. Claus for photo ops between 6 – 7.30 p.m., before returning for a solo Sunday, again from 6 – 7.30 p.m.

Additional activities for the final weekend include another Silent Dance Party in Addison Hall Dance Studio on Saturday, December 5, from 6.30 – 8.30 p.m., and on Sunday, December 6, with a Cookie Decorating workshop in Brevik Hall from 6 – 7.30 p.m. In between, the nearby Aurora Public Library will hold a unique event for local youngsters.

"We're proud to team up with the Aurora Public Library for a 'Stuffy Sleepover' on Saturday, December 5," says Shelley Ware, Special Events Supervisor for the Town of Aurora. "Families can register their Stuffy at the Library and the Stuffies are going to sleep over in the Christmas Market. We're going to make sure that we snag Santa to have some photos with the Stuffies, but they are going to see what the building is like after hours when it is all closed up.

"We really want patrons to be impressed as they walk away from the Market nights. We want them to be able to explore both outdoors and indoors. We really want them to walk away wanting to come back, and that the first thing they do when they get home is phone a friend to tell them what they did and they have to check it out."

For more information on Aurora's Christmas Market, including a full roster of activities, and event registration/ticketing where applicable, visit aurora.ca/christmasmarket.

CULTURALLY speaking
By Aitak Sorahitalab, Education Manager
Aurora Cultural Centre
PERFORMING ARTS
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Culturally Speaking | *Winter registration is open at Aurora Cultural Centre*

A pullover you'd like to keep wearing might be the last thing you'd think to bring to an art workshop. The same goes for a favourite photograph you've always meant to put on display. Both are good starting points in our studio this winter!

This winter, you can transform everyday objects in our workshops. In Intro to Hand Sewing & Mending, you'll learn basic stitches and make an embroidered patch from reclaimed fabric. In Wood Photo Transfers & Mediums, you can turn a favourite photograph into a mixed-media tableau to display in your living room.

You can paint and explore alongside people you've just met, learn to mix colours and work with washes in Watercolour I; build on your practice in an advanced acrylic class; or join one of our dedicated painting and drawing classes for adults 55+.

There are more ways into the studio this winter, whether you're bringing your child to their first art class or setting aside a morning to make something with your hands.

Make by Hand! Try carving wood, shaping wool through needle felting, or making a beaded necklace led by an Indigenous artist. Each medium gives you something different to work out and take home.

You can create for the season by making a crepe-paper cyclamen and its patterned leaves. You can also explore cultural traditions, practise brushwork in Traditional Chinese Ink Painting, and see how the shade of your ink can change a stroke.

Even if you've been meaning to pick up a guitar, Guitar: The Basics is a chance to learn alongside other beginners.





Our younger participants – along with the families – have room to grow through art. In Early Years' Visual Art, 2- to 3-year-olds and caregivers make art side by side. In Comic Drawing for Children, ages 7 to 12 invent characters and tell stories one panel at a time. Our March Break art camps run March 15–19 for ages 4–6 and 7–12.

If you need a little time for yourself, take a creative pause with Expressive Painting for Wellbeing. Or join us for An Accordion Journal Journey, where you'll layer paper and found images into a fold-out book and write a few lines by hand. How often do we get to do that these days?

Winter 2027 registration opens Monday, December 7, for both Aurora residents and non-residents. Browse the classes, workshops and camps at auroraculturalcentre.ca and come make art with us as winter begins and the days start to get a little longer.

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Teen singer-songwriter dedicates new track to benefit Yellow Brick House



Chloe Sofia

Contributed photo

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

A Milton singer-songwriter is using her talents to benefit the Aurora-based Yellow Brick House shelter for women and children escaping domestic violence.

Chloe Sofia, 16, launches a new single this week, Girls Around The World, and now through December 31, listeners can download the song for $5 or purchase a special music bundle, with 80 per cent of all sales going to Yellow Brick House and the Anne Marie D'Amico Foundation.

Sofia is releasing the single to coincide with the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

Chloe says the song itself was inspired by an episode of Game of Thrones where Cersei Lannister says, "Everywhere in the world they hurt Little Girls," and the artist decided to use her talents to foster the change she would like to see in the world.

"When I first wrote the song, it was because I heard about what had happened with the Cornell Seven at Cornell University in the States and it was a really tough thing to hear. I had started seeing different things on the news about how girls around the world are being hurt in different countries in different ways and that one quote from Game of Thrones really sparked the concept of the whole song.

"For the connection with Yellow Brick House, I know they rely mainly on donations to continue the amazing work they're doing, so I thought it would be a really great idea to help raise some money to help them continue [that]. Writing songs is all I know how to do; I feel very strongly about what I'm writing for and I thought that this was the best way I could get my point across."

Sofia has been writing songs since the age of eight. Her goal from day one has been to "write songs that make people feel something real," and that remains the case as she uses her music and lyrics to draw people's attention to an all-too-real problem.

"I think my personal measure of success would be people speaking up [about domestic violence] and spreading the word because I think that each person has a role to play in this issue," says Sofia. "I often hear, 'Oh, we're so lucky where we live,' which, yes, it's true, but there's violence against women everywhere. I just really hope each person speaks up and stands up for women."

Chloe Sofia's "Girls Around The World" is set to drop Wednesday, November 25. For purchasing options, visit chloesofia.ca.

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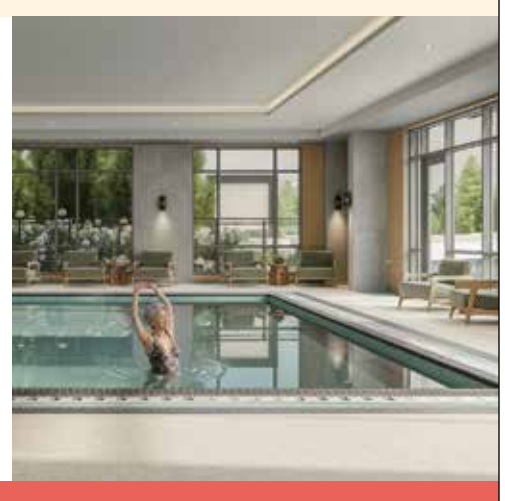


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EMPTY BOWLS RAISES $23,000 FOR COMMUNITY

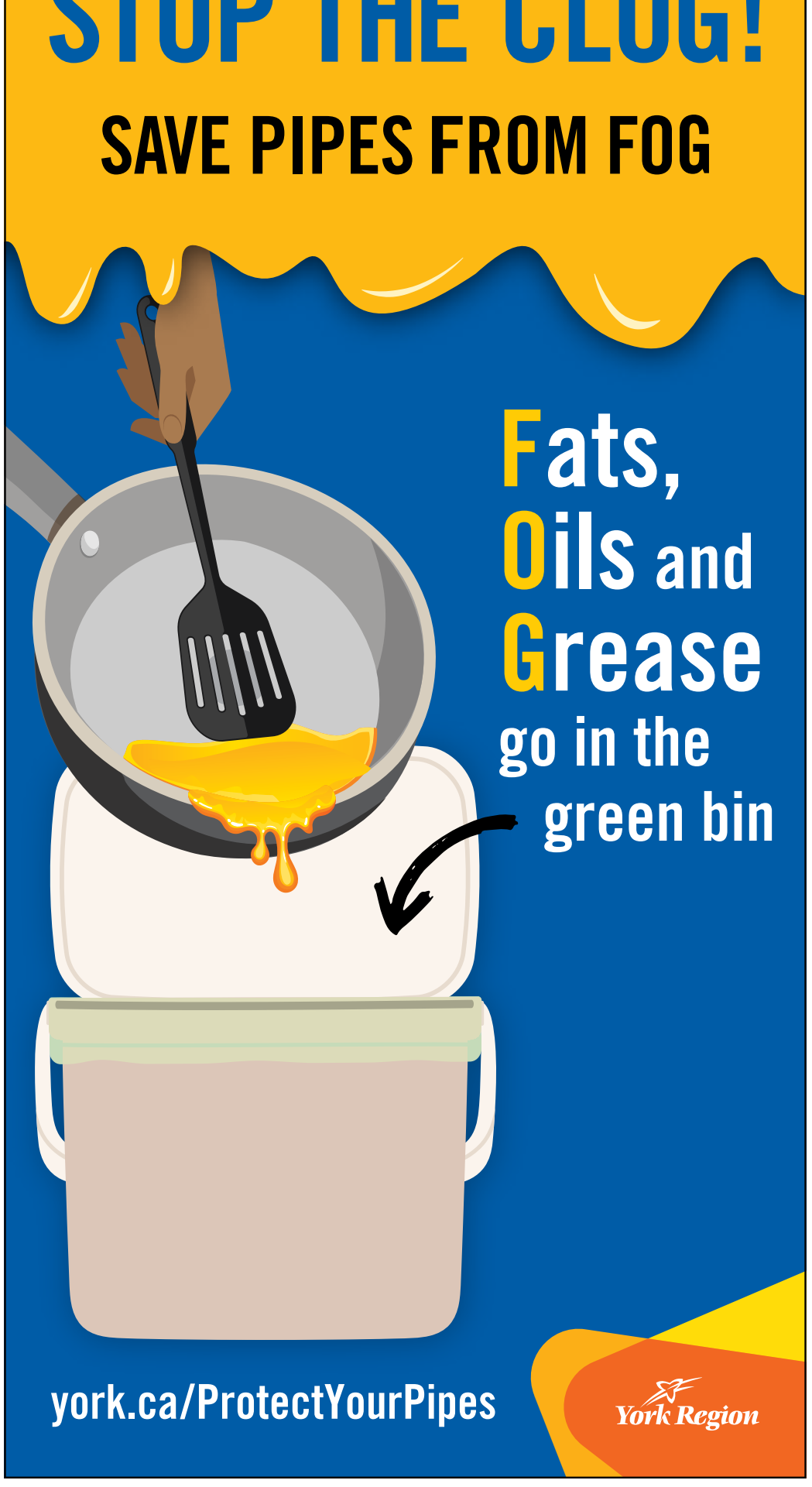
There are few things that nourish body, mind, and soul better than soup as the colder weather sets in, and this was demonstrated by Aurora's Pine Tree Potters Guild, as numerous local restaurants and eateries, and the community at large, came together for the Guild's annual Empty Bowls fundraiser. Each year, Guild-members craft hundreds of bowls for the event where ticket-holders have the chance to purchase their bowl of choice and, once the purchase is made, they also have the chance to sample locally-produced soups over luncheon. This year's event, which was held once again at Newmarket's Old Town Hall on November 19, raised a whopping $23,000 for Aurora's Welcoming Arms and Newmarket's Inn from the Cold. (From Top) Vicki, Jacqui, Desiree, Barb, and Denise celebrate the event's success. Carrie, Andrew, Amanda and Sophie. Jackson and Mari-Lisa. Susan and Donna.

Auroran photos by Glenn Rodger











Mayor looking forward to what new Council "will accomplish together"



Mayor Mrakas accepts the Chain of Office from the Town Clerk. **Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger**

From page 1

such democratic traditions.

"Tonight is both a privilege and a responsibility. Over the next four years, the future of Aurora will be shared by this group's leadership, dedication, and commitment to the community. There will be moments of celebration and moments of challenge. In those difficult times, I encourage you to think back to this evening. May those reflections provide you with clarity when decisions are difficult, strength when the path forward is uncertain, and determination to always act in the best interest of Aurora."

These were themes touched upon by Mrakas in his address that followed.

Describing the feeling of standing before residence once again as Mayor, he said it was an "honour" and being entrusted with the responsibilities of the office "is something I will never take for granted."

"Thank you for your trust, your confidence, and for giving me the opportunity to continue serving the community that means so much to all of us," he said, thanking those who had taken an active part in the evening's ceremony, from the Royal Canadian Legion's Colour Guard to the St. Andrew's College Pipers, and 2026 Aurora Teen Idol Scarlett Lau.

"Over the past eight years, I've had the privilege of witnessing the very best of Aurora," he continued. "I've seen neighbors support one another through difficult times, I've seen volunteers step forward to strengthen our community, and I've seen local businesses invest in our future. I've seen residents who care deeply about the place that they call home. That spirit is what makes Aurora special, and it is why I remain as committed today as I was when I first took office to listen, to lead with purpose, and to always put Aurora first.

"I would like to take a moment to congratulate my colleagues on Council, both returning and newly elected. Lauren, Angela, Nikki, Michael, Jessie, Harold, it is a privilege to serve alongside each of you, and I'm genuinely excited about the work ahead. While we each bring different experiences, perspectives, and ideas to this Council table, we are united by something far more important: a shared commitment to the people of Aurora, and a desire to leave this community stronger than we found it.

"The decisions that we'll make over the next four years will help shape Aurora's future, and that responsibility belongs to all of us. So does the opportunity. Our residents expect us to listen, to work together, and, most importantly, to get things done. I'm confident that together we can do exactly that. By bringing our talents, experiences, and perspectives together in service of a common goal, I believe we can achieve great things for our community. Together, we can build on Aurora's successes, meet challenges with confidence, and create an even brighter future for the residents that we serve today and for generations to come. Aurora's future is bright, and I look forward to all that we will accomplish together."

Looking over his first two terms, Mrakas said Aurora has "made tremendous progress over the last eight years." These strides forward, he said, included a strengthened municipal financial picture, investments in parks and recreation, support for local businesses, the protection of green spaces, and the opening of "transformative projects" like Aurora Town Square.

But, he added, there is much more work to be done to "continue building on that progress."

"We're going to see our historic downtown become the destination we've always envisioned," he continued. "With the restoration of Victoria Hall, the continued success of Aurora Town Square, and the upcoming Yonge and Wellington streetscape improvements, we're bringing together years of planning and investment to create a downtown that honours our history while embracing our future. With dedicated left and right-turn lanes at Yonge and Wellington, we're also taking meaningful steps to improve traffic flow through the heart of our Town. But we're not just revitalizing our downtown; we're creating a destination that will be the pride of Aurora for generations to come. That same vision extends across our entire community.

"We'll continue expanding our trail network, connecting neighbourhoods, and creating more opportunities for residents to enjoy the natural beauty that makes Aurora so special. We'll continue investing in parks, recreational facilities, and public spaces that meet the needs of our growing community. From sports fields and community parks to facilities for families, youth, and seniors, we'll continue making investments that enhance quality of life and bring people together. We'll also continue building strong partnerships with our school boards and community organizations, partnerships like our recent agreement involving the former Dr. G.W. Williams School lands, which will create new opportunities for community use of recreational spaces. I believe that when we work together, share resources, and find creative solutions, we can accomplish more for our residents while making responsible use of their tax dollars.

"We'll continue addressing traffic congestion, strengthening public safety, supporting local businesses, and ensuring that growth happens on Aurora's terms. Community safety will remain one of our highest priorities. We will continue working closely with York Regional Police to strengthen enforcement, leverage technology, and ensure our officers have the tools and resources that they need to keep our community safe. Aurora is already recognized as one of the safest communities in York Region, but we are not content to stand still. Our goal is clear: to make Aurora the safest community in York Region, a place where every resident feels safe in their neighborhood, on our streets, and in every corner of our Town. We will continue to do all of this while maintaining the responsible financial management that has positioned Aurora for long-term success. Now, these aren't simply projects; they're investments in our future, in our families, in our neighborhoods, and in the next generation of Aurora."

Looking beyond policy, Mrakas' address had plenty of personal touches, noting the evening was particularly poignant for him as it was the first time he stood at a Council inaugural without his parents in attendance.

"Last year I lost my father and just a few months ago I lost my mother. There isn't a day that goes by that I don't think about both of them. My parents taught me the values that continue to guide my life: work hard, treat people with respect, keep your word, stand up for what is right, and never forget the importance of family and community," he said. "Those lessons shaped the person I am and the Mayor I strive to be. I wish they could be here tonight, but I know that they would be proud. I hope that my service to this community, that I continue to honour everything they taught me."

Addressing his wife, former local councillor Alison Collins Mrakas, he added: "People often see the public side of being Mayor: the meetings, the events, the decisions, and the responsibilities. But what they don't always see is the person standing beside you through it all – the late nights, the long days, the missed family moments, and the challenges that come with public life. You have been my strength, my sounding board, my biggest supporter, and when I needed it, the person who reminds me to keep everything in perspective. You celebrated the victories with me and helped me through the difficult moments. Through it all, you never stopped believing in me. I know I couldn't do what I do without you by my side."

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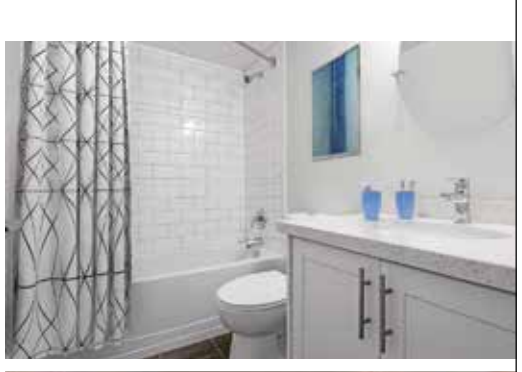


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Councillors pledge collaboration

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Aurora's new Council has, in the words of Ward 5 Councillor Jessie Fraser, "a majority of strong, well-educated, strongly opinionated women" amongst their ranks; and while none of the six Councillors who took office last Tuesday are known for shying away from expressing their views, they all pledged collaboration as they began the work of taking Aurora forward.

Members of Aurora's 2026 – 2030 Council formally took their Oaths of Office in Council Chambers on Tuesday, November 17.

Following an inaugural speech by Mayor Tom Mrakas, each member had a few minutes to address their guests in Council Chambers, and members of the community at large in person and via the meeting's live-stream.

COUNCILLOR LAUREN HANNA, WARD 1

"It's such an honour to be sitting here and greeting you this evening from this side of the table. What a novelty that I think will always be a true honour and privilege, and I don't see that wearing off," said Councillor Hanna in her first remarks as a lawmaker. "I simply want to say thank you. Thank you everyone – everyone who supported my campaign, who provided a listening ear and advice, everyone who took a lawn sign or made a donation, who told their network, and above all, who placed their trust in me and gave me their vote. It is such an honour, and above all, I want to thank my family….

"Running for office is a little like raising children. It truly takes a village. Like parenting, it's a humbling experience. As I begin this role, I'm committed to upholding the values that I spoke about throughout my campaign: accountability, engagement, and fostering belonging in our community. I look forward to working with all of you, my colleagues on Council, and I know that we won't always agree, but I truly believe we can accomplish great things together, and I know we'll do it respectfully when we're brought together and reminded of our shared vision in how much we love Aurora and making the Town an even better place than it already is."

COUNCILLOR ANGELA DAUST, WARD 2

Councillor Daust too said it was an "honour" to earn the trust of Ward 2 residents for the next four years, thanking the team that supported her along the way, including her family and community volunteers.

"I have delegated many times to Council on behalf of the area residents," she said. "I have always said to my husband that I wanted to somehow give back to the community after my retirement from the City of Toronto. Being a member of Council is a good fit for me given my years of municipal experience. It is an enormous amount of work and commitment to put your name forward for a chance for a Council position. I commend all of the candidates who ran in this election. I had the pleasure of meeting all of you. Some have even become friends. As a Councillor, I look forward to a Council that collaborates and makes decisions as a team.

"This is the benchmark of a functional Council. I believe that if we work together, we can accomplish great things and make Aurora even better than it already is. To the residents of Ward 2 in Aurora, I want to tell you that I will work hard every day as your Councillor. I will always be accessible and responsive to your concerns and ideas. While canvassing, I asked residents what their concerns in Ward 2 were and what is on their wish list. I am summarizing what I have heard in a report which I intend to present to Council in the near future. I will make sure that your vote for me was the right vote.

"My motto has always been that I will be your strong voice on Council, and that is exactly what I intend to be."

COUNCILLOR NIKKI ALBER, WARD 3

Teamwork was key for Councillor Alber in her first remarks from the table, where she said she welcomes all feedback as it is an "opportunity for me to grow."

"Welcome to my 'self-growth journey.' Come along!" she joked.

In all seriousness, Councillor Alber said she was looking forward to working with each of her Council colleagues and while she knew they wouldn't agree on everything, "I really hope we can all have the intention to work as a team and to help one another."

"I'd like to thank the outgoing Councillors for taking the time to meet with me, for answering my endless questions over the last six months, and for providing me all the support that they've provided me," she continued "I'd also like to thank all of the candidates who put their name forward. I now know firsthand just how much time and energy and money and courage it takes to run in an election, and so thank you for throwing your name in, and I really do hope that you stay involved.

"On a more personal note, I want to thank my village, because without my family, friends and volunteers, I would never have been able to run this successful campaign. Not only would I not have been able to run this campaign, but I wouldn't have been able to accomplish all the other things that I've done in my life. Fortunately for me, I have such a big village that I can't possibly name you all by name in the two-minute time limit that I was given, but please know that I'm grateful for every single one of you, and without you I couldn't have achieved all the goals that I've accomplished so far.

"Lastly, I'd like to thank all of the voters. Thank you for answering your door when I knocked. Thank you for supporting me with a lawn sign. Thank you for voting for me if you voted for me, and I am going to work my best over the four years to make you proud. Please don't hesitate to reach out to me. I'm hoping that I can become a tool to get people involved and help you stay engaged, so I really do hope to hear from every one of you over the next four years to give me input and feedback."

COUNCILLOR MICHAEL THOMPSON, WARD 4

In this new term of Council, Michael Thompson takes on the role of longest-serving incumbent Councillor, beginning his fifth term after first being elected in 2010.

"I could never imagine that 16 years later I'd still have the privilege of serving this wonderful community," he said. "I want to sincerely thank the residents of Ward 4 for the confidence and trust they have placed in me. I am deeply grateful for their support, and I do not take that responsibility for granted. I also want to thank everyone who supported and encouraged me throughout the election campaign. Your kindness, encouragement and generosity meant a great deal to me. I'd also like to take a moment to congratulate and welcome the four newly-elected members of Council. I know firsthand how exciting and rewarding public service can be, and I wish each of you every success as you begin this new chapter."

Thanking his wife, Natalie, and daughter, Carly, for their support over the years, he said he's worked alongside "dedicated colleagues," municipal staff and residents in "helping the community grow and prosper," and he's looking forward to continuing that journey.

"I'm proud to have played a part in helping our community grow and prosper, but along the way, I've learned that some of the most meaningful things we accomplish as Councillors aren't necessarily the ones that make headlines. Sometimes it's simply helping a resident resolve a problem, improving safety in a neighbourhood, or taking the time to listen," he said. "Those moments remind me why I first chose to serve and why I remain just as committed today.

"As we begin this new term of Council, we have important decisions ahead. We

Continued on page 15



as new term begins

From page 14

must continue to manage our finances responsibly, guide growth thoughtfully and build a safe, vibrant, and connected community. I look forward to working with all my colleagues. Each of us brings different perspectives and ideas to the Council table, and I believe our shared commitment to doing what's best for Aurora will serve us well. To the residents of Ward 4, thank you once again for placing your trust in me. I will continue working hard every day to earn that trust. After 16 years, I can sincerely say that serving this community remains one of the greatest honours of my life. I'm proud of what we've accomplished together, optimistic about what lies ahead and grateful for the opportunity to continue to serve this community that we all so love and cherish."

COUNCILLOR JESSIE FRASER, WARD 5

Surveying her Council colleagues on Tuesday night, Councillor Fraser saw something that Aurora hasn't seen before: a Council where the majority of members are female.

"I cannot wait to see what a Council with a majority of strong, well-educated, strongly-opinionated women will be," she said.

In her opening remarks, Councillor Fraser said she was "honoured and grateful" that Ward 5 residents placed their trust in her and she was "looking very forward to getting to work to serve our community."

"To everyone who voted, no matter who you voted for, thank you for taking the time to show how important Aurora is to you. In Ward 5, we had a 47% increase in voter turnout from the last election. That shows, I think, just how much we all care, how important this is to all of us," she said. "Congratulations to all those candidates who stepped forward to run. It really shows what an amazing Town we live in when there are so many incredible people that want to serve. A big congratulations also to the other members of the newly elected Council. I'm looking forward to working collaboratively with each and every one of you over the next four years to make Aurora even better.

"I also want to thank my family and friends and neighbours, especially my family who are here today, who stepped up to support me during my campaign. It was really humbling to have so many community members, brand new friends who were willing to devote their time and energy to supporting our shared goals for Aurora, for our community. I'd also like to thank the Councillor that sat in this seat for 14 years, John Gallo. Thank you for your dedication to our community, and I hope I can prove that you've left Ward 5 in good hands.

"I ran on a platform of three pillars: accountable and transparent leadership, community engagement through two-way communication, and advocacy for access and inclusion through interest-holder collaboration. These pillars will underpin my priorities and actions while on Council. You can expect me to thoroughly research every issue, ask relevant questions, clearly articulate my position, even if it's controversial, listen to your concerns, even if we disagree, and communicate not just the what, but the how and why of what is happening in our Town. I promise to continue that same path of accountability, transparency, communication and collaboration that I set out on my campaign, and I'm excited to begin."

COUNCILLOR HAROLD KIM, WARD 6

As he began his fourth term, Councillor Harold Kim said taking the Oath of Office is never a privilege he takes lightly, and thanked God for giving him his first "nudge to run back in 2014."

"He opened my eyes to the fact that life is not about observing, it's about participating, and there is no greater joy than making a difference in the lives of others," he said.

Thanking his wife Carol, their children Hudson and Hunter, and their respective parents for their support along the way, he shared a story of a father and son walking along a beach in south Florida following a storm. The duo, he said, saw a double amputee making his way back from the surf to the boardwalk, but, out of the corner of his eye, saw the man fall face-first into the sand after losing control of his crutches.



Newly-elected and re-elected Councillors were piped into Council Chambers by students from St. Andrew's College. Pictured here are Councillors Lauren Hanna, Angela Daust, Nikki Alber, Michael Thompson, and Harold Kim entering the ceremony. **Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger**

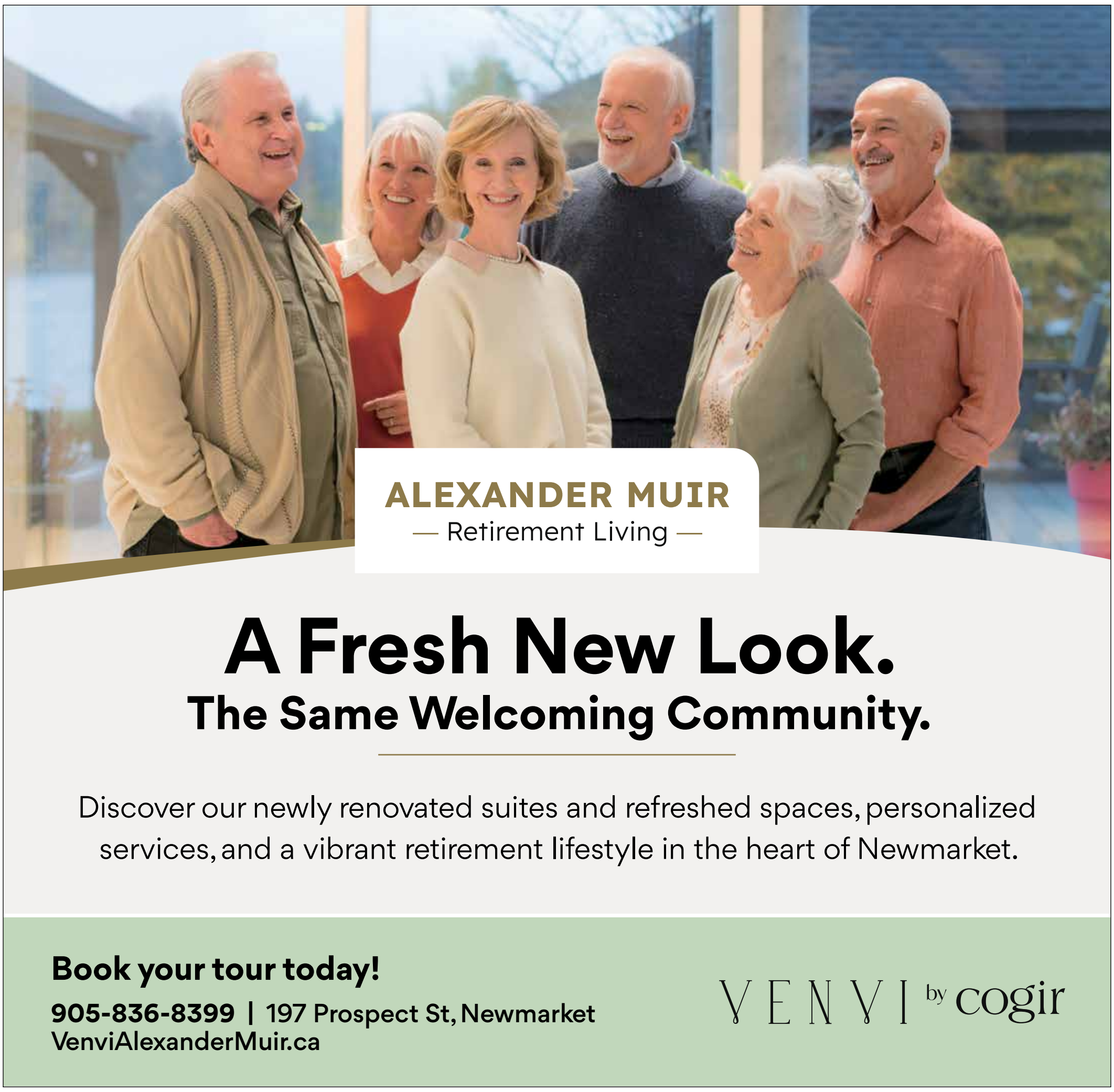
"His son saw the man ran toward him and said, 'I have to help that man.' And the father stood there paralyzed by his own hypocrisy. He missed seizing his moment, but his son did not. Compassion moved him to act. The boy tried desperately to lift the man, but he was too heavy. Then the teenagers on the boardwalk noticed and rushed to help. Soon the man and his crutches were carried to the safety of the boardwalk. The son walked back to his father and said, 'I wasn't strong enough to help the man.' He couldn't see that no one would have helped if he had not taken the first step. And the father's shame was overwhelmed by a deep pride in who his son was becoming," said Kim.

"I know that many times I've looked the other way and then sat with the guilt afterward. I don't think my story is unique. Every one of us has had a moment when we could have stepped up and didn't. We can't respond to every need, but there are moments we need to seize. And when we do, we often find people right beside us ready to help. That's the great thing about Aurora. This is a community built by volunteers, people who seize the moment. One person can't do it all, but Aurora is full of well-meaning people who want to contribute, who want to participate."

Looking to the Council term ahead, Councillor Kim said he is focused on connecting new residents in Ward 6 to the "broader community because who our neighbours are and whether we know them shapes the quality of life on every street."

"Here at Council, my hope is that at any given time, someone will seize the moment to bridge a divide, champion a tough item, or listen a little closer to a resident who feels unheard. And the rest of us will lend our strength," he concluded. "As I have always said, it is not about who has the greater idea. It is about supporting the great idea. Elections can test a community. Now our residents are asking one thing of this table, that we come back to the centre to what we all share: community [and] helping one another. It was never about any one of us. We will disagree on various Town items, and we should, but we cannot be divided for any reason. We are more effective together than divided.

"To the residents who placed their trust in me, once again, thank you. To my colleagues, I am honoured to serve alongside you. Let's be bold enough to take the first step, humble enough to rely on each other's strengths, and united in keeping Aurora a place we are all proud to call home. So, here's to collaboration, friendship, unity, and most of all, community."



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VOL 28 | NO. 7 | 905-727-3300 TheAuroran.com FREE WEEK OF NOVEMBER 26, 2026

Junior Tigers roll to 5-2 win over Pickering Panthers, but flu-ridden squad drops wild 9-5 decision to North York



Leading scorer Javian Nei (15) scored two goals in 18 seconds to rally the flu-stricken Tigers, but Aurora's comeback fell short in a 9 – 5 loss to North York on Friday night at the ACC.

Auroran photo by Jim Stewart

BY JIM STEWART
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

The red-hot Aurora Junior Tigers climbed above .500 and into sole possession of sixth place in the OJHL East with a 5-3 win over the Pickering Panthers on Tuesday afternoon at the ACC.

Tigers' captain Andrijs Bundzenieks dished out three assists to spur Aurora's well-balanced attack versus Pickering.

Colton Bain, Sheamus Gunn, Jackson Zinkie, Javian Nei, and Sebastian Catalano scored one goal each to lead the home side to its third consecutive win.

Aurora's Head Coach Ilir Mehmeti described the motivating factors behind his team's excellent matinee performance on Tuesday.

"We treated it as a four-point game. We were tied with them in the standings going into the game so the kids were energized and it was like a playoff game—that combination and the fact that it was Pickering. The rivalry is a long one between the clubs. We needed the win and the kids showed up."

Coach Mehmeti was pleased that his players showed up so effectively for the rare noon hour start and praised the performance of Bundzenieks's line versus the Panthers.

"That line played really well. Andrijs has the ability to create space for himself and his wingers finished the passes. They were outstanding against Pickering."

After collecting their seventh win in eight games on Tuesday, the Tigers' coaching staff and players were stricken by a flu outbreak that scuttled team practices on Wednesday and Thursday.

Alas, the Junior Panthers' three-game winning streak came to a crashing halt in a disappointing 9-5 loss to the North York Rangers on Friday night.

The defeat was deconstructed by Coach Mehmeti, who was ailing as well during our post-game interview.

"We've been battling sickness all week—both practices leading up to tonight's game were cancelled as we tried to get players rested and healthier. There were signs of fatigue early in the game, but the Rangers also came to play. We fell prey to what they wanted to do tonight and our special teams—especially our PK—was not good. Giving up five power play goals really hurt us—that was the difference in the game. We scored two quick goals by Javian in the second period to get right back in the game, and then we gave up another power play goal to go back down by four goals."

On Hockey Ends Hunger Night at the ACC, the community gave generously to a local food drive to support the Aurora Food Pantry. Dozens of boxes of non-perishable food items were left at the Tigers' Box Office as fans entered the arena.

In a similar spirit of giving, the under-the-weather Tigers spotted the Rangers an early two-goal lead.

Jax Conklin's goal 3:18 into the game got North York on the board and Nathanial Adams's power play marker less than two minutes later to make it 2-0. It was the first of five Ranger power play goals that sunk the Tigers.

After a major brawl at 10:19 of the opening frame in which Tigers' veteran Nic Ferrante pummeled Ranger Patrick Farmer in a fight that erupted after the original altercation was set off by North York's Sean Sheridan.

He was given the extra aggressor penalty--meriting the Tigers with a five-minute power play.

After Ferrante and Farmer earned their fighting majors and banishment from the game, Jonathan Scott of the Tigers and Joey Longo of the Rangers earned ten-minute misconducts for joining in the three-bout melee.

Tigers' defender Davis Castle also was also assessed a ten-minute misconduct for his skirmish with Sheridan.

However, Nei nullified the man-advantage caused by Sheridan's major with a tripping penalty, and the Rangers' power play made the Tigers pay.

During the ensuing 4-on-4, North York defender Mason Wharton coasted in from the blue line and rifled a shot from the left faceoff circle that beat Aurora goaltender Lucas Carpino, bulged the twine, and gave the visitors a 3-0 lead.

With Tigers' forward Max Skinner in the box for tripping, North York's power play struck again when Linden Keith snapped a puck from above the right faceoff circle over Carpino's right shoulder and into the back of the net with 3:18 left in the first period.

After Tigers' defender Nick Frasca was called for yet another Aurora tripping penalty, this time only 1:16 into the second period, Keith struck almost immediately. Sixteen seconds into his team's man-advantage, the North York forward fired his second goal of the game by skating out of the corner untouched and roofing one past Carpino to give his team a commanding 5-0 margin.

Seconds after North York went up by five, the Tigers rallied to narrow their deficit to 5-2 with two quick goals.

After receiving a sweet feed by Bundzenieks, Nei made a nifty move off the left wing, deked Rangers' goaltender Kent Gravelle, and lifted the puck over the North York netminder's right shoulder and into the net.

Eighteen seconds later, Max Skinner found open space between the circles, and slipped the puck to Nei who snapped it in one motion coming in off the right wing to beat Gravelle and elevate the home side's hopefulness.

However, North York responded to Aurora's uprising with three more goals to take an 8-2 lead and chased Carpino from the cage at 9:11 of the middle frame.

Although the Tigers showed some fight in the third period as they fought the flu and a very game opponent to narrow the margin to 8-5 on goals by Cadorin, Frasca, and Zinkie, Keith earned his hat trick when he fired the puck over one-hundred feet into the open net vacated by substitute goaltender Colby Booth-Housego with 8:06 to go to provide the margin of victory for the feisty Rangers.

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Provincial Champion Baseball Coach Jordan Keon honored by AKBA with Lifetime Achievement Award

BY JIM STEWART
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER



The 16U AAA Aurora King Jays hosted the 2026 OBA Championships at Stewart Burnett Park in September. **Auroran photo by Jim Stewart**

Local baseball fans need a positive story after watching the Toronto Blue Jays plummet from first to worst in one season and watching highly-coveted off-season free agent Tarik Skubal sign with the New York Mets for $450M for nine seasons on Monday.

The spurned Blue Jays, a year removed from a heartbreaking World Series Game 7 loss to the despised Dodgers, did little to inspire communities across Canada in 2026 after such a magical season in 2025.

By contrast, our local Jays had much to celebrate in 2026 with a range of competitive rep teams and the Aurora King Baseball Association made sure one of their most valuable assets did not ride off into the sunset without public recognition of his coaching feats.

During the AKBA's 2026 Awards Ceremony at the David Di Simone Performance Hall, President Kevin Charbonneau presented retiring bench boss Jordan Keon with a Lifetime Achievement Award.

The 2016 Provincial Champion Head Coach, 2015 and 2016 AKBA Coach of the Year, and organizational mainstay commented on receiving the prestigious award: "It was special because it was the last award of the night and it was a great setting for our Association's year-end awards at Aurora Town Square. Great venue. It was an honor to be presented with the award in my final year of coaching, especially after hosting and competing in the OBAs on Labor Day Weekend."

Keon's 16U AAA Jays hosted the OBA Championships in Aurora in September with lots of hometown support. More than 150 fans filled the bleachers at Stewart Burnett Park and his team—spurred on by the big crowds-- opened the tournament with two consecutive wins: 5-2 over Peterborough in Game 1, and 6-2 over Ajax in Game 2.

However, the 16U Jays were walked off twice in a row in soul-wrenching fashion—2-1 by Scarborough and 4-3 to Etobicoke – in the double-elimination tourney to finish fifth in the province.

Despite the disappointing exit from the OBAs after a promising 2-0 start, Coach Keon reflected on his deeply-satisfying final season of coaching ball in Aurora during which his 16U Jays improved remarkably in the final two months of the campaign.

"We were hosting the OBAs for the second year in a row so we had a goal, but we had a tough start to the season. We flipped the switch at a tournament in the USA and played really well against very good teams. We came home with confidence and won a tournament in Hamilton against teams we'd be playing in the OBAs. We snuck into the EBLO playoffs and beat Markham who ended up going undefeated in the OBA championships."

In addition to coordinating this past season's successful OBA Finals tournament at Stewart Burnett Park, the veteran manager was instrumental in securing and hosting the provincial baseball championships in 2023, too, where his team finished third and even more importantly helped establish Aurora as a baseball town.

"It was really cool to host the OBAs in 2023. It was the first time that the Hallmark Diamonds had opened and they were great to play on. We finished third in the 13U age group."

The success of Keon's squads over a 15-year period and the creation of excellent training facilities in Aurora since the Pandemic have helped build the Town's capacity to develop excellent baseball players.

Keon noted the positive impact on local players: "We have three top tier facilities now in Aurora, including the Mets. These are great facilities that anyone can book. If we can get a turf diamond in Town, that would be a big step for baseball in Aurora. When you're a community team, you should be able to train in your own town. A turf field would help extend the season, especially in April."

The Town's reputation as a burgeoning baseball centre was reinforced when the York Simcoe Baseball Association recently named the AKBA the multi-regional loop's "Association of the Year."

Keon was pleased to see so many positive developments regarding baseball in Aurora.

"It's great that hosting the OBAs has become the norm and our association has grown up. Winning 'Association of the Year' is great recognition by the YSBA. We were considered a smaller centre for a long time, but now we're very competitive with the bigger organizations like Vaughan and Markham. Having a great executive led by Kevin over the last five years has really made a difference, too."

One of the most important breakthroughs for baseball culture in Aurora was the rapid ascent of Keon's 11U AA provincial championship squad in 2016.

He recalled quite fondly the closing moments of the OBA championship-clinching game.

Continued on page 23

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Sport Aurora honors twelve selfless members of local athletic organizations at its annual Volunteer Recognition Luncheon



Newmarket-Aurora MPP Dawn Gallagher Murphy, kneeling beside President's Award-winner Stephen Kimmerer, presented twelve sports organization volunteers with certificates from the Provincial Government at Sport Aurora's annual Volunteer Recognition Event at Boston Pizza on Saturday afternoon.

Auroran photo by Jim Stewart

BY JIM STEWART
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Sport Aurora convened its annual Volunteer Recognition Luncheon at Boston Pizza on Sunday afternoon.

Volunteer Recognition Chair and Emcee Stephen Forsey was at his elegant best—resplendent in his classic black tuxedo—but expressed his disappointment at "being edged out by Robert Pattinson as the new James Bond."

After eliciting chuckles from the 85 attendees with his tried-and-true tuxedo-related jokes, Forsey noted thoughtfully that he dons such formal wear "as a sign of respect to the volunteers we're recognizing today."

He thanked Boston Pizza for hosting the event—noting that, "This is where it all began when we started hosting Volunteer Recognition Luncheons 16 years ago. It's nice to come full circle."

After thanking the host and sponsors, Forsey turned his attention to the 12 award winners and stated succinctly: "Today is all about celebrating your contributions to sport."

The long-time Convener and Secretary/Treasurer of the York Oldtimers' Hockey League couldn't resist one more tux-related joke. In reference to his valet "look," Forsey held aloft a set of car keys and said "Whoever gave me these keys and asked me to park their car, I can't guarantee that it's still there."

Forsey invited Newmarket-Aurora MPP Dawn Gallagher-Murphy to the stage to present each volunteer award winner with a certificate of appreciation from the provincial government.

The congenial MPP and resident of Aurora extolled the virtues of volunteers and the value of local athletic clubs.

"Sport is such a key part of our community. Sport Aurora makes a difference in the Town of Aurora—they bring together all the sports clubs. This event is all about the giving—all the volunteering – that you've done for your organizations. You've given your energy, passion, and dedication in the mentoring of our youth. You're really helping the next generation grow. Enjoy the day today, on behalf of the Province of Ontario."

Forsey and Gallagher-Murphy recognized eleven volunteers for their selfless service to Sport Aurora-affiliated athletic organizations: Jessica Cormier (Aurora Barbarians Rugby Football Club); Stuart Walker (Aurora Community Tennis Club); Deb Sreiberg (Aurora Lawn Bowling Club); Jordyn McConnell (Aurora Tigers Jr. A Hockey Club); Sophie Webster (Global Gymnastics); Carole Simmons (Special Olympics Ontario - Aurora); Stephen Ward (Storm Volleyball); James Robinson (York Oldtimers Hockey League); Saba Nourbakhsh (Kids Super Gym); and Barry Kilner, Parham Najmi, and Steve Tasker (Aurora Soccer Club).

The highlight of the Luncheon was the presentation of The Sport Aurora President's Award to Stephen Kimmerer for his four decades of conspicuous contributions to the St. Andrew's College athletic and academic community.

Kevin McHenry, Head of School at SAC for 18 years, praised his long-time colleague vocational spirit: "After teaching for five years in Spruce Grove, Alberta, Steve joined us at St. Andrew's where he taught art, history, and media arts. He lived on campus where he raised his two boys who had the St. Andrew's campus as their backyard. As a photographer, he served as staff moderator and designer of the school yearbook for decades. He coached community hockey at St. Andrews and was a pitching coach for the Aurora Jays."

McHenry noted that Kimmerer coached the SAC Saints hockey teams to "two OFSAA gold medals in 1987 and 1993, but, most importantly, Steve was a mentor and father-figure to our students. Steve, you spent four decades giving your heart to our community."

After the Head of School's moving tribute to the President's Award Recipient, Kimmerer acknowledged that he hasn't been able to coach recently due to "a stroke a few years ago", but he reflected on the "co-curricular spirit at SAC where 99% of the staff was dedicated to after-school programs. This kind of dedication was considered normal."

The veteran multi-sports coach and staff moderator was moved he received Sport Aurora's most prestigious volunteer award and noted, "I want to thank everyone for being here today."

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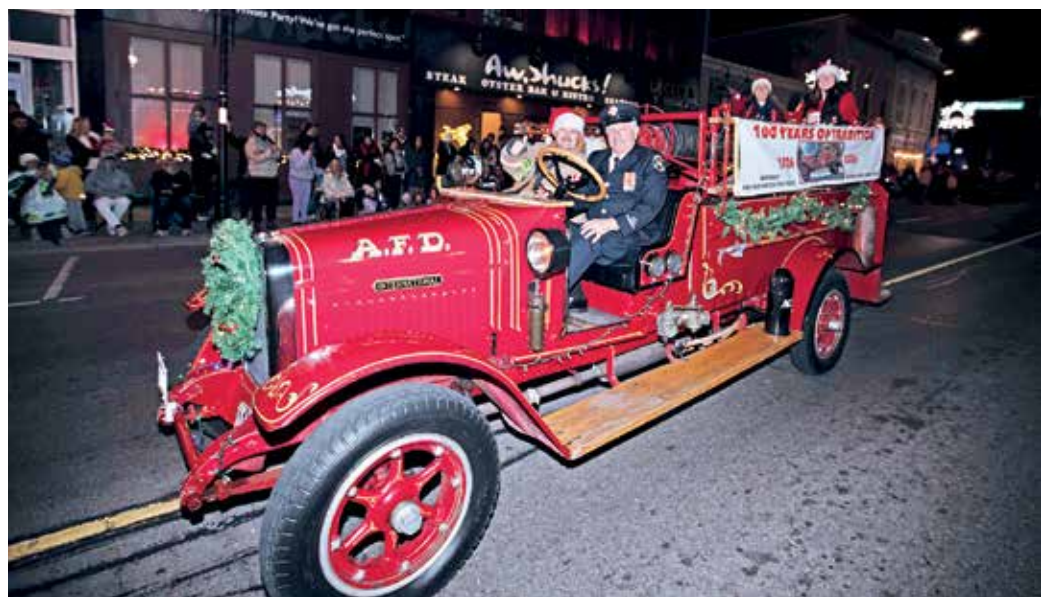
















Hundreds of residents lined Yonge Street from Orchard Heights Boulevard to Murray Drive on Saturday night for the Town of Aurora's annual Santa Under the Stars Parade. A perennial family favourite event that, for many, signals the start of the holiday season locally, the parade featured Santa and Mrs. Claus, area MPs and MPPs and their representatives, Mayor Tom Mrakas and Councillors Lauren Hanna, Angela Daust, Michael Thompson, Jessie Fraser, and Harold Kim, Citizen of the Year Doug Steele, representatives from the Royal Canadian Legion, Central York Fire Services, and York Regional Police, and colourful and festive floats from local service clubs, businesses, and more. And on hand to provide parade-goers with a warming mug of hot chocolate from the veranda of Hillary House ahead of the parade were Leena, Alise, Annie, and Kayla.

Auroran photos by Glenn Rodger

at Santa Under the Stars







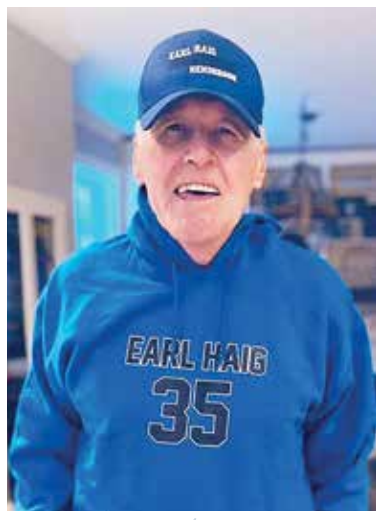






OBITUARIES - FOREVER IN OUR *Hearts*

JOSEPH HENDERSON



It is with deep sadness that we announce the passing of Joseph Henderson, who passed away peacefully on November 21, 2026 at the age of 91.

Beloved husband of Wendy Henderson for 59 years, Joe was a devoted family man whose love, wisdom, and unwavering support shaped the lives of those around him. He was a proud father of two children, Shirley and David (Andrea), and a cherished grandfather to four grandchildren, Alexander, Rachel, Jake & Lily who brought him immense joy and pride.

Born on February 10th, 1935 in Montreal Quebec, Joe lived a life defined by hard work, continuous learning, and dedication to his family. He was known for becoming a pilot at age 16, before he obtained his Driver's License.

Joe was a lifelong hockey player and hockey fan, with the Montreal Canadians being his favourite team. Joe prioritized staying healthy, both physically and mentally and ensuring that his family was following his example.

Whether spending time with loved ones, expanding his education, or helping those he loved move their lives forward, he touched countless lives and leaves behind a lasting legacy of love.

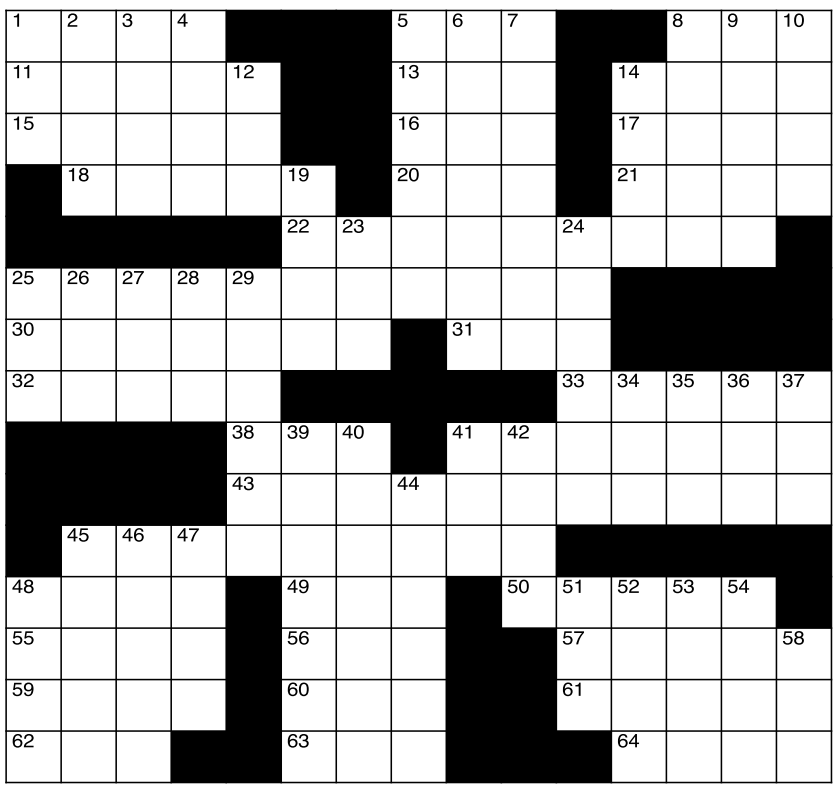
He will be greatly missed by his family, friends, and all who had the privilege of knowing him. His memory will be treasured forever and carried forward through the values he instilled in those he loved.

Forever loved, forever remembered.



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CLUES ACROSS

1. Insect feeler
5. Central processing unit
8. Part of (abbr.)
11. Typical
13. Tall, rounded vase
14. __ Alto, California city
15. Lustrous, velvet-like fabric
16. "Fresh Prince of __ Air"
17. Hebrew calendar month
18. British surgeon who discovered bone disease
20. Agreement between debtor and creditor (abbr.)
21. Elongated part of anatomical structure
22. Acts slowly on
25. Keeps a little too safe
30. Greek seaport
31. "Baba O'Riley" rockers
32. Vision
33. Potassium nitrate in mineral form
38. Midway between northeast and east
41. Not a pro
43. Give a new look
45. Sensational
48. Nobel Prize-winning physicist
49. Annoy constantly
50. Vaccine developer
55. Lying down
56. Type of language (abbr.)
57. Flat-bottomed boat
59. Smallest or slightest
60. Bind
61. Speeds
62. The products of human creativity
63. Consume food
64. Ancient Greek sophist

CLUES DOWN

1. A young canine
2. As fast as can be done
3. Soviet moon probes
4. Sharp spasm of pain
5. One who adheres to a specific art movement
6. Show parts of
7. Unfasten
8. San Diego ballplayer
9. Santa
10. Rocky peaks
12. "Matt Houston" actor Horsley
14. A written agreement between two sides
19. Beginning to end (abbr.)
23. Greek goddess of the dawn
24. Not written in any key
25. Organized missions
26. Seven
27. Work unit
28. Bravo! Bravo! Bravo!
29. Broadway legend Bernadette
34. Belonging to a thing
35. Vietnamese offensive
36. Bitterly regret
37. Make a mistake
39. Newborn child
40. A combined landmass
41. Satisfaction
42. Hilly peninsulas in Denmark
44. Young swine
45. Type of sword
46. Siskel's partner
47. Brood of pheasants
48. Hindu model of ideal man
51. Suitable in the circumstances
52. La __ tar pits
53. Unstressed-stressed metrical foot
54. California wine country
58. Badly

CMHA's Giving Tuesday aims to expand mental health support for local youth

From page 3

building a viable future economy," says Rappos. "As a father of two children and a former coach of youth sports, I have had a front row seat to how challenging it can be for youth to access mental health support. This Giving Tuesday, I am matching up to $5,000 of donations, because I know the youth in our community are counting on us."

If you are interested in donating to the CMHA-YRSS, the donation link will go live Friday at: justgiving.com/campaign/cmhagivingtuesday2026.

THiNGS... *you ought to know*

NOVEMBER 27 – 29

The Town of Aurora will host the first of its two Christmas Market weekends at Aurora Town Square. Enjoy the holiday season at Aurora's Christmas Market - one of the Top 100 Festivals and Events in Ontario! This event is filled with good cheer, hands-on workshops and activities, fantastic seasonal vendors, food vendors and more. Check out different vendors on-site each night. The Market will be held each evening from 5 – 8.30 p.m. For more information, visit aurora.ca/christmasmarket.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 28

FIRESIDE HOLIDAY MARKET, second-annual event in support of mental health programs – today from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Northridge Community Church, 15338 Leslie St, Aurora, ON. Shop local for gifts, crafts, jewelry & baked goods. Free admission, FREE parking & festive family fun. FREE photos with Santa! @sisterz_co_

DECEMBER 4 – 6

The Town of Aurora will host the second of its two Christmas Market weekends at Aurora Town Square. Enjoy the holiday season at Aurora's Christmas Market - one of the Top 100 Festivals and Events in Ontario! This event is filled with good cheer, hands-on workshops and activities, fantastic seasonal vendors, food vendors and more. Check out different vendors on-site each night. The Market will be held each evening from 5 – 8.30 p.m. For more information, visit aurora.ca/christmasmarket.

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Support AbuseHurts' Delivering Hope Full Circle Program textile recycling and donation program. A greater number of people are wanting to donate or get rid of unwanted items, increasing the need for more outlets being available to receive the items. This program will provide a convenient way for people to donate or get rid of used/unwanted clothing, blankets, linens and furniture and will help lessen the amount of items ending up in landfills. Materials that were previously perceived as waste will now be seen as a valuable resource further encouraging redistribution. The items will be recycled in the following ways: To be given to individuals who are survivors of violence and are transitioning from shelters into new homes; To be sold at occasional pop-up sales; To be sold to a textile recycler, which makes for an ongoing source of funding for Abuse Hurts enabling them to provide their services to the thousands of people that require them each year. When and Where: Monday, every week, 10:30 a.m. – 1.30 p.m., with 15-minute time slots, and Wednesdays from 10.30 a.m. to 3 p.m. with 15 minute timeslots. If you do not have an appointment, we cannot accept your donation. Visit AbuseHurts.ca to select your drop off time slot. Located at 120 Harry Walker Parkway North, Newmarket.

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CHRISTMAS SHOPPING – Christmas is just around the corner and it's a busy season for local churches, schools, non-profits and more as they bring together local businesses and artisans for a series of Christmas and Holiday markets. One of the first out of the gate this year was the annual Christmas Market hosted by Trinity Anglican Church on November 7. The event featured artisan vendors, a silent auction, children's face painting, a bake table, a hot and cold luncheon, and a chance to shop the Church's Clothes Closet for premium fashions. **Auroran photos by Glenn Rodger**

Provincial Champion Baseball Coach Jordan Keon honored by AKBA with Lifetime Achievement Award

From page 18

"It was 0-0 heading into the seventh and we scored five at the top of the seventh. However, our starter got tired and we gave up three runs at the bottom of seven. After a long coaching discussion, we brought my son, Fionn, in from shortstop to pitch in a 5-3 game with a runner on and one out. He gave up a bloop single to make it 5-4, got an out, gave up a hit, and with two out and a runner on second and third, he threw a 2-2 fastball for the K and we won. The way it happened—we were in a do or die moment—and experienced the highs and lows of scoring five and then giving up four. It was super exciting to hold on and win. I was as nervous as can be. I'll always remember that pitch that won the OBAs. We had been a dominant team that year—played .800 baseball and won 2-3 tournaments, too. We even lost on Friday night to Niagara and won six in a row that weekend, including a 2-1 game when we were on the brink of elimination. We were one of the first AKBA teams to win the provincials."

Keon's provincial championship in 2016 and a fine coaching career that spanned from 2010 to 2026 was at the core of his special recognition this Fall by the AKBA.

However, being honored with a Lifetime Achievement Award is not a new experience for Keon who was a multi-sport athlete as he grew up in Aurora.

Remarkably, the national champion curler was recognized by Curling Ontario in 2023 for his numerous club and provincial championships, administrative work as a convener and board director, and skipping his Richmond Hill Curling Club team to a national title in Edmonton.

The appreciative Keon chuckled when reflecting on being honored with such an award: "That one was a little bit funny because I felt I was too young to win it. I did win five provincial championships to qualify and it was very cool that they did a surprise presentation at the Club. The way it was presented was great and the extra recognition was meaningful. The big bonus for winning the Curling Ontario Lifetime Achievement Award is that I save $20 every year because I have a free Ontario Curling membership for life."

Two lifetime achievement awards – in less than five years in two different sports in two different towns – speak volumes about Jordan Keon's contributions to amateur sport in Richmond Hill and Aurora, especially in the last ten years.

It's been a decade of dynamic achievements for the Aurora resident who grew a wee bit wistful knowing this is the end of line after coaching his sons, Fionn and Maddux, for so many years. As he exited our booth at Wicked Eats to go curling in Richmond Hill, Coach Keon nodded his head and acknowledged the end of a deeply-satisfying era for him: "I'll miss it."

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