

York Region's biggest party returns for more



By Brock Weir

15 community charities are each \$33,900 richer this week following last weekend's successful two-day Hoedown.

Hosted by Magna International, two days of revelry, culminating in Saturday's Wild, Wild West Hoedown headlined by Lonestar, raised \$463,000 which will be shared entirely by its community partners.

'We started this Hoedown 26 years ago in our back yard after two guys approached us to hold a party in the back yard to benefit the local Leisure Complex,' said Belinda Stronach. 'We said, 'Sure, why not?' and we had 700 people in that first year. Since then, we have just been doing it again and again and the reason it is so successful is because of all of you, everyone who comes out to support it, and we have about 600 volunteers here. Volunteers are the ones who make Hoedown happen.'

Thousands of people dressed in their cowboy boots and hats, and some in head-to-toe denim, descended on the 'Magna Corral' on Wellington Street for two days of celebrations.

Friday night's party was the grand finale of the Hoedown Showdown, an opportunity for aspiring country singers to put their voices forward for a chance to sing before thousands, gain some valuable recording time, and win a Yamaha guitar in the process. Attracting over 90 applicants from across Ontario, this number was eventually whittled down to a Top 40 who performed at Theatre Aurora this summer. From there, the Top 20 where eventually worked down to a manageable Top 10 contestants at this month's Ribfest. On Friday, it was time for the Top 10 to shine.



Although Aurora residents Jessica Joerges and Shannon Beresford made it to the final round, the top prize ultimately went to Gabriella Caruso, who wowed the crowd with her renditions of Tammy Wynette's 'Stand By Your Man' and Patsy Cline's 'Crazy.'

'It was a lot tougher this year than last year,' said country singer Chris Seldon, who judged the competition alongside Magna CEO Don Walker, Steve Hinder, and Ms. Stronach. 'Many of them never performed live on stage and it is pretty nerve-wracking. We are

proud of everyone who entered the competition, participated, and made it here tonight.?

While each contestant had their share of fans in the audience, many came to see event headliner Tim Hicks perform, just days after bagging the Rising Star Award at the Canadian Country Music Association Awards. Saturday's show was headlined by Lonestar, who brought the house down.

While the 2014 cheque was significantly lighter than the \$567,000 raised in 2013, this year's benefiting charities will ultimately each have a larger share of the pot. These community partners include the Aurora Youth Soccer Club, Aurora Minor Hockey Association, Big Brothers Big Sisters of York, the Queen's York Rangers 2799 Army Cadet Corps and Welcoming Arms.

?I want to thank you for your generosity in coming out tonight and for spending a lot of money,? Mayor Geoffrey Dawe told the crowds after unveiling the cheque with his counterparts from King, Newmarket, East Gwillimbury, and Georgina. A sincere thank you to the Magna Corporation and the Stronach family. We are so fortunate to have a corporate citizen like Magna. Very few communities can make that claim.?