

"150" Tattoo draws hundreds



By Brock Weir

It was almost standing room only Sunday afternoon as hundreds of residents filled the Aurora Community Centre to mark the Town's 150th birthday with the Aurora 150 Tattoo.

Bringing together nearly 300 individual performers from across Ontario ? and indeed across the country ? in the form of seven pipe and drum bands and performers, people were up on their feet celebrating Aurora's milestone and marvelling at the intricacy of the performers.

Under a cloudless sky, festivities got underway before the Tattoo itself with a ?tough mudder? for kids, held across the street at Machell Park. Parents looked on with pride as the youngsters tackled the obstacles under the guidance of Aurora's air cadets. The ?mudder? was held in conjunction with an Appreciation Lunch hosted by the Queen's York Rangers.

After that, it was time for the main event.



(ABOVE) Aurora's White Heather Pipes and Drums received an ovation from the hometown crowd as did (TOP) band members from the Governor General's Horse Guards. Auroran photos by David Falconer.

The program began with Official Town Crier John Webster getting everybody into the spirit of the occasion. Following the arrival of Newmarket Aurora MP Lois Brown, MPP Frank Klees, and Aurora Mayor Geoffrey Dawe, the program truly got underway with performances from the Glendaurel Highlanders, a performance of God Save the Queen by Aurora Teen Idol Taylor Mansillo, accompanying the Band of the Governor General's Horse Guards, and the combined bands performing 'Highland Cathedral' featuring the voice of Amanda Jones.

For Ms. Jones, a member of Aurora's White Heather Pipes and Drums, performing 'Highland Cathedral' before so many was a personal highlight.

'It was amazing,' she said, following the event. 'The first song really set the tone. It is a powerful song on its own and with the massed bands and the brass section. I don't know about the rest of the audience, but I felt a very powerful feeling behind me and it was a great way to mark a big celebration.'

'Even going right down to the end, everyone came out and performed really well, and what went through my mind was, 'this is awesome!''

Following the march off of the combined bands and colour party, performances continued with the Ulster Accordion Band, performing such favourites as 'Danny Boy' and 'When Irish Eyes are Smiling.' Next up were the Barrie Pipes and Drums, the Aurora Community Band with selections from 'Les Miserables', and Scottish dancing led by students from the MacMurphy School of Highland Dance.

Carrying on with the highland theme, they were followed by the Paris Port Dover Pipes and Drums, the return of the Governor General's Horse Guards, the White Heather Pipes and Drums - which had a rousing ovation from the hometown crowd - and colourful, action-packed performances from members of the Spectrum North Baton Club.

The grand finale brought nearly all the performers back on the floor for an intricate display of marching and performances, including an encore performance by Ms. Jones of the national anthem and Amazing Grace, in memory of people who have lost their lives in conflict and violence, most recently in Boston.

Mayor Geoffrey Dawe took the salute in the march past.

'I am extremely impressed by the precision,' said Mayor Dawe as the crowd dispersed after the show. 'I am really pleased with the crowd. You always wonder whether or not you're going to get the crowd out, but there weren't very many empty seats and we had great participation today.'

When asked what went through his mind when taking the salute, marking such a significant anniversary in the Town's history, he said it was difficult to put into words. People, he said, had been asking him whether Aurora would be holding a Tattoo again, and he said the interest was out there for an encore; maybe not next year due to the work and planning that went into it, but in the near future.

One of the many people who had first-hand experience of the work it took to put this together is Alison Collins-Mrakas, chair of the Aurora 150 planning committee. Appearing moved by the results of the team effort, she summed it up in one word: 'spectacular.'

'I think [Town of Aurora Special Events coordinator] Shelley Ware, David Veitch, and Norm MacKenzie should be extremely proud of themselves at Aurora's first Tattoo,' she said. 'It was unbelievable, standing room only, and just fantastic. What I kept thinking was, 'This was worth it!' From the mudder outside to the luncheon with the Queen's York Rangers, any and all were worth it.'

'The mass finale at the end and Amazing Grace, I don't know what to say without crying!'

Next up in Aurora's 150th Anniversary calendar will be Canada Day celebrations, beginning with a special youth day on Saturday, June 29 (details to follow), the Rotary Club's Dance in the Park on Sunday, June 30, headlined by Lighthouse, and, of course, the Canada Day Parade and celebrations on Monday, July 1.