

30th Hoedown raises \$538k for 20 community groups



By Brock Weir

Twenty community groups, serving thousands of people across York Region and beyond will have a share of over half a million dollars raised over the course of the milestone 30th Magna Hoedown.

This year's two-day party, York Region's largest, raised an impressive \$538,105 for charities.

The grand total was announced last Saturday night at the grand finale under the big top, which was headlined by the iconic Canadian band Blue Rodeo, with the cheque held aloft by Magna CEO Don Walker, who was joined on stage by York Region Chair Wayne Emmerson, Aurora Mayor Geoff Dawe, Newmarket Mayor Tony Van Bynen, and East Gwillimbury Mayor Virginia Hackson.

"The whole Hoedown event keeps on getting bigger and bigger," Mr. Walker told *The Auroran* at the start of the weekend's festivities. "a special Hoedown held earlier on Friday for over 1,000 special needs students, their teachers and caregivers. "This is a great community event, and it is great that so many volunteers get involved and raise so much money."

Now in its fourth year, the Student Hoedown was a joyful way to kick off the two day party, which continued later that evening with Friday headliners The Road Hammers, and the naming of this year's winner of the Hoedown Showdown, whittled down from the Top 10 contestants who filled the tent with music that night.

Among the thousand having fun at the Student Hoedown was Alana Miragelia, a teacher at St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School, who accompanied several students to the festivities.

"This is a phenomenal event for our students," she said. "It is an opportunity for them to integrate with their peers from all other schools and to socialize and just have fun. We're so appreciative to Magna and everyone who hosts it because we adore it. It is one of our absolute favourite annual events."

"The students all know to get out their cowboy hats, their bandanas, and they always support it. It is the highlight of our year. This morning and yesterday we practiced our line dancing, decorated some cowboy stuff, and we got everyone to bring in bandanas."

Similar sentiments were shared by Hagh Joo, a teacher at Richmond Hill High School.

"I think this is so wonderful and we really appreciate it," she said. "The kids absolutely love it. They look forward to the event every year and they really enjoy preparing for it. We look at pictures in preparation and have slide shows, and this really helps with our numeracy, literacy, and we really incorporate the event into our programs as well."

The Student Hoedown is the brainchild of York Region teachers Derek Bunn and Dave Pilkey.

Surveying the thousand kids in the tent, Mr. Bunn said he was thrilled to see the momentum continue for another year.

"The momentum is there because we're helping out people in the community," said Mr. Bunn. "Each of our students and staff that are coming from the schools are each bringing in a charity donation for Magna's 20 charities, and that makes you feel good when you're helping people, it makes you feel good that you've done your part in the community and helping people like DeafBlind, Kerry's Place Autism Services, and more."

Also getting a sneak peek of the tent at the Student Hoedown was Newmarket-Aurora MP Kyle Peterson, who has been a regular fixture at the event for over a decade.

Ahead of the nighttime parties, he said he was particularly excited to see Blue Rodeo, a band he has followed since he was "really young" take the stage once again, but he was also excited to see the wider-reaching annual impact of Hoedown.

"I most look forward to getting out and chatting with the people in the community, seeing all the charities and organizations that get involved, and it is great to see them out in the community promoting what they do and their activities at the same time," said Mr. Peterson. "The Hoedown isn't just the events themselves, but it is a weeks-long rollout before the event, which is always a great opportunity for organizations to get the message out in the area to learn what they are doing for the community."

Partner charities this year include the Aurora Football Club (Aurora FC), the Aurora Tigers, Autism Ontario York Region with Epilepsy York Region, Big Brothers Big Sisters of York, DeafBlind Ontario Services, the Georgina Arts Centre and Gallery with The Training Centre, The Georgina Skating Club, Kerry's Place Autism Services, Learning Disabilities Association of York Region, Marquee Theatrical Productions, Newmarket Food Pantry, Newmarket Stingrays Swim Club, The Optimist Clubs of York Region, Shenderey Gymnastics Institute, the Southlake Regional Health Centre Foundation, St. John Ambulance, The Peer Project, Victim Services of York Region, Welcoming Arms, and the Women's Centre of York Region.