

Aurora aims for 'grand slam' in dragon boat race

By Jeff Doner

The Town of Aurora is raring to go for the tenth annual Dragon Boat Festival for United Way at Seneca College, King Campus this Saturday.

The Aurora team, along with numerous others from neighboring municipalities and corporations, will not only vie for top spot, but also to raise funds for the United Way's signature event of the year.

The event is used to kick off the United Way's fundraising campaign and this year will draw close to 30 teams and up to 1,000 people.

'It has been another phenomenal year,' said Neil Garbe, CAO for Aurora. 'Firstly, we have a friendly competition among the municipalities, which we won last year, so we're pretty excited about defending our title again this year.'

All competition aside, Garbe said the Aurora staff is thrilled to once again be taking part in the event. It will be his second time competing in the race.

'It's fantastic, not only to support a great cause, but also to team-build and have some fun at the same time,' he said. 'It's a lot of fun and a hard workout. I think you go full steam for about three minutes sprinting, but it's a lot of fun.'

Garbe said staff came up with the idea to join the Dragon Boat Festival, so they got together, found sponsors and put an 18-person team together. So far they have raised \$4,600 over the last two years, with more still to come from this campaign.

Garbe said the money was raised from local corporate sponsors as well as internally through small events, like selling ice cream on Fridays.

'Part of our participation is to actually build awareness among our staff about the United Way, which leads into our big campaign in the fall when we are asking for donations from our staff as part of a bigger campaign for the United Way.'

Although the competition is all in good fun, Garbe said Team Aurora will be looking to beat out the other municipalities in the race.

'We're trying for the grand slam here!' he said with a laugh. 'We've won the Public Works Challenge and we won the Southlake Run Challenge and now we're going for the dragon boat challenge and we're hoping to retain our title from there. We've got a good streak going here, which just proves the superiority of Aurora staff.'

But Garbe was quick to point out that the Dragon Boat Festival is about much more than winning.

'There are a number of things that the Dragon Boat event fulfills,' he said. 'The United Way uses the Dragon Boat to launch their official campaign goal, so they'll set their target at what they want to raise among the big campaign.'

United Way York Region serves nine municipalities, including Aurora, East Gwillimbury, Georgina, King, Markham, Newmarket, Richmond Hill, Vaughan and Whitchurch-Stouffville.

In addition to its traditional role of supporting agencies to meet urgent needs, United Way is working to tackle the root causes of social issues.

To help strengthen York Region's quality of life, United Way is uniting people and resources on three priorities: moving people from poverty to possibility, helping kids be all they can be, and building strong neighbourhoods.