

Aurora picks Tom Mrakas as next Mayor



Newly-minted Mayor-Elect Tom Mrakas is greeted at his victory party Monday night by wife Alison Collins-Mrakas. Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger

By Brock Weir

It takes a whole community to move forward, according to Mayor-Elect Tom Mrakas.

Mr. Mrakas, a first-term Aurora Councillor, unseated two-term incumbent Geoff Dawe to be Aurora's next mayor Monday night, with 38.3 per cent of the vote, or 4,781 of a total 17,446 ballots cast.

Mr. Dawe placed second with 28.3 per cent of the vote (3,533), while former MPP and Aurora councillor Chris Ballard placed third with 19.8 per cent (2,475), followed by incumbent Councillor John Abel in fourth with 13.5 per cent (1,684).

Voter turnout was down from 2014, according to Town Clerk Mike de Rond, who said in 2018 just 32.1 per cent of eligible voters cast their ballots when the last Municipal Election brought out 35.7 per cent of voters.

Mr. Mrakas will lead a Council with many familiar faces, including incumbents Harold Kim, Wendy Gaertner, Sandra Humfries and Michael Thompson. They will be joined by rookie candidate Rachel Gilliland, who placed fifth in her very first municipal election, as well as John Gallo, the sixth place finisher, who returns to the table after serving on the 2010-2014 term of Council.

After the election results rolled in at Town Hall, Mayor-Elect Mrakas was greeted with a thunderous reception at his victory celebration at Aw, Shucks, entering to chants of "Mayor Tom! Mayor Tom!?"

Taking the stage, he thanked all those who made his win possible.

"I can't thank you enough from the bottom of my heart for all the hard work, all the volunteering, [and] everything each and every one of you have done, whether it is contributing, donating, giving some time, going out [to deliver] signs. From the bottom of my heart, I thank each and every one of you."

He also took time to thank his parents, siblings, as well as his wife, former Aurora councillor Alison Collins-Mrakas, for their support along the way.

"Alison, we started this journey 15 years ago when we came to this community; they opened up their hearts to us and we opened our hearts to them," he said. "I love you and everything you have done for me and, together, with everyone here, we're all friends, we're a community, and we're going to make our community the greatest."

In addition to his family, Mr. Mrakas paid special thanks to three mentors who have helped him along his political journey: former Aurora councillors Bill Hogg and Steve Hinder, as well as former mayor Tim Jones.

"These are friends and family members to me," he said. "I appreciate everything they have done for my family and for myself, and for the advice they give me. I know they are always going to tell me the truth; they're not just going to pay lip service to me. I think

that when you have three people such as this that you can talk to, talk in confidence and get the advice from them you need to move forward, I think not only is it great for myself, but it is great for our community moving forward that I have three inspirational people to be able to turn to and ask them for advice.?

The Mayor-Elect offered congratulations to Mr. Dawe, Mr. Ballard and Mr. Abel for their service to the community.

In the end, he said it was all about community, and the next four years will be about building the community up from where it is today.

?It really does take a whole community to move forward,? he said. ?I think moving forward that is what we need in our community. I have been missing it for over twelve years and, to me, the job of the Mayor and Council is to be everyone's neighbour, everyone's friends, and that is how we keep a tight-knit community and how we grow as a community. I am looking forward to elevating our community over the next four years, not just myself, but with my colleagues, my new Council members.?

THE COUNCIL RACE

In addition to Mayor-Elect Mrakas, the 2018-2022 Council term will be a mixture of the same, returning and new faces.

Change was the only certainty at the start of this Council race. With three incumbents running for Aurora's top job, two of them were guaranteed from returning to the table, while Councillors Paul Pirri and Jeff Thom decided not to seek re-election.

The new Council term will see Councillor Harold Kim take the helm of Aurora's Deputy Mayor, having finished first in a field of 16 candidates.

Mr. Kim came out on top with 6,013 votes, followed by incumbents Wendy Gaertner with 5,875, Sandra Humfries with 5,456, and Michael Thompson with 4,991, newcomer Rachel Gilliland with 4,800, and returning councillor John Gallo with 4,781.

This is Councillor Gaertner's fifth election victory, making her Aurora's longest-serving incumbent Councillor for the second term running.

?I'm overwhelmed,? said Councillor Gaertner. ?I am very grateful ? I am very grateful to be in Aurora and in Canada. I ran a pretty lean campaign with a lot of volunteers. I have always believed you listen to the residents and try to help them. I think that's just what I do. I think people feel I address the issues fairly and I try to put myself in other people's places. It is just all about listening ? and helping. I have helped a lot of residents over 15 years!?

While Councillor Gaertner will begin her fifth term, Rachel Gilliland is the proverbial new kid on the block, bringing home her first electoral victory in her first municipal campaign.

?I am just so honoured and so humbled by this entire experience and I really hope I can represent Aurora's voice over the next four years,? said Councillor-Elect Gilliland. ?I want to see some positive change and I really hope I can give that to them. It is just very humbling. I was watching [the results come in] and was just hoping and praying. I did a lot of hard work, had my feet to the pavement and I did the best I could do in my heart and just knew the results would show. Fortunately, it came true. I had some great competitors. Everyone was fantastic, I respect them all, and I am just grateful I am here.?

The new Mayor and Council will be sworn in this December.