

## Aurora Sports Hall of Fame welcomes Class of 2025



The 12th Annual Aurora Sports Hall of Fame Induction Celebration Evening was enjoyed by over 230 attendees at the Royal Venetian Mansion on Thursday.

Enshrined into the Hall of Fame were Ultra Runner Erlinda Biondic, CFL tailback Robert Reid, Hockey Coach Heather Morning, and NHL veteran Kris King.

With David Bowie's 'Heroes' playing in the background, the opening lineup of Inductees strode into the Mansion's main dining room. Included in the star-studded, red-jacketed procession were Charles Leeming (2023), Janice Jones (2022), Ryan Gardner (2019), Colin Graham (2021), Reg Chappell (2019), Paolina Allan (2018), Mike Kitchen (2016), Lois Thompson (2021), Jim Clark (2019), Bob Wall (2017), Mike Murphy (2016), and Alex Ansell (2014).

As they gathered around fellow Inductee Lowell McClenny (2015), the esteemed group received a standing ovation by an appreciative audience

Once the red-jacketed brigade was assembled at the stage, the Royal Canadian Legion Honor Guard piped in the colours and the 2025 Inductees—Biondic, Reid, Morning, and King—made their entrance to the rhythmic clapping of the guests.

Piper Clinton Lau of St. Andrew's College delivered a brilliant performance as he led the honored quartet to the Mansion's stage.

The amiable and engaging Rod Black—the event's long-time Emcee—introduced the blue-jacketed President and Chair Javed Khan as well as co-host Alexandra Bonham who delivered greetings from the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame.

After the rules of engagement were delineated, emcee Black introduced Mayor Tom Mrakas to deliver a keynote to the assembly.

Mayor Mrakas noted, 'It was truly wonderful to be here.' He thanked Black for his 'energy and humor' and observed that the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame 'is more than just a list of [honored athletes and builders]. It's a reflection of who we are as a Town—a community that produces great athletes and great role models.'

Mayor Mrakas spoke soaringly about the 'four inducted individuals'—Erlinda, Kris, Heather, and Robert—and praised each of the inductees as 'hometown heroes.' He concluded his address by noting that the ceremony was 'more than a tribute of the past—it's a

promise of the future as generations are born into these traditions.?

He reminded Aurorans that ?we raise champions together and they represent our shared pride in our community.?

?I associate this event with the seasons?there's Winter, Spring, Summer, and then there's the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame Celebration Evening,? said Black, picking up the thread.

Black marveled at recent athletic feats including the Blue Jays' heartbreaking loss in the World Series ??So close,? the Stouffville resident intoned?and praised the team's esprit de corps and their profound impact on the nation.

The long-time TSN broadcaster spoke in abject amazement at recent sporting achievements such as a ?68-yard field goal in the NFL,? and ?8-foot NBA players making 3's from the logo.?

In the context of these high-flying feats of contemporary athleticism, he spoke lovingly of the Town's sports shrine??This is a special place?the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame? and Black ran through a series of ?C-words? with positive connotations including ?Connection, Character, Courage, Community, and Canada? associated with one of the best Sports Hall of Fame in the province.

A combination of emcee-delivered accolades and high-quality production videos introduced each inductee. Upon arrival on stage, each inductee was greeted by a sponsor, an athlete in the community playing the sport of the honoree, and President and Chair Khan, which created a smooth-flowing event and efficient photo ops.

The first arrival on this bustling stage was the Belle of the Ball?Erlinda Biondic?who stole the hearts and stirred the souls of the audience with inspirational images and imparted wisdom that only an octogenarian could deliver.

Biondic, 85, opened with a charming self-effacing moment when she observed, ?I am glad I'm the first speaker?I get drowsy by 8:00.?

Her admission earned an amused and appreciative round of applause and she added, ?Before I have a senior's moment, I want to thank so many.? She praised ?the special people in my life? and saved her most poignant moments for her husband, long-distance runner extraordinaire George Biondic: ?Without him, I wouldn't have done these things. He's an inspirational athlete, coach, masseuse, spokesman?..?

George?as he tends to do with perfectly-timed insights and humor-- interjected from the front row: ?Don't forget ?cook'.?

His bride gently chastised him for having problems ?boiling water.? The love birds' spat ended when Erlinda looked at her hubby and steeped the moment in sentimentality: ?I am forever grateful to you, Georgie.?

After this public display of affection, she joked about some miscues she's committed on the road, including mistaking foot creams during one particularly painful trek. Erlinda admitted to applying vast amounts of ?Ibuprofen cream to her feet accidentally instead of Vaseline prior to a big run and ?Ahh?there was no pain'?

Biondic charmed the audience with her trekking missteps and anecdotes and showed her eternally- youthful side by describing the highlight of a recent rec centre workout: ?For six hours daily, I look at pickleballers and kids playing basketball and?if I'm lucky?a good-looking guy on the pool deck. Little does he know that there's an 85-year-old female admiring his physique.?

Biondic brought the house down with her admission and she proffered some pearls of wisdom in her closing words: ?You're never too late to follow your dreams?. Dare to be your best?and as Barack Obama said back in 2008, ?Yes, we can.' I say to you, ?Yes, you can!''?

The inspirational octogenarian, who took up trekking and long distance running at 74, received a thunderous standing ovation

complemented with much hooting from the tables of boisterous and fun-loving female hockey players buttressing the back of the room.

Black was so taken by Biondic's performance that he proclaimed, "That's one of the best speeches I've heard" and added admiringly: "Erlinda, you're going to enjoy hosting this event for the next five years."

Black switched gears seamlessly from admiring the boundless energy of Biondic to describing the foot speed of rapid Robert Reid who, according to the Emcee, was "Faster than Wi-Fi."

The England-born Reid was renowned for his speed as a track athlete and tailback at Newtonbrook Secondary School in Toronto and at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia. Reid wowed the SFU coaching staff into offering him a scholarship after showing off his acceleration and strength during training camp.

He described his progress as football player from "a walk-on at SFU's training camp to being selected 9th in the first round of the 1984 Draft by the Saskatchewan Roughriders."

Part of Reid's regimen was "Working out at Vic Tanny's Gym" which elicited sighs of recognition and reflection from all the boomers assembled as much of the room flashed back to 1970s Toronto.

Reid added "That's where I put ten pounds on to my 150-pound frame."

Reid spoke glowingly and warmly of his days at Newtonbrook ("In Grade 13, we won the only Toronto football championship in the school's history."), Simon Fraser University where he triumphed "in track and field and football" and, finally, in the CFL with both Saskatchewan and Ottawa in the 1980s when he played against such league greats as "Matt Dunnigan, Damon Allen, and Pinball Clemons."

The charming football player-turned-actor thanked friends and family, "especially Charlotte with whom I've been married for thirty-eight years."

Reid reflected on a goal he set as a determined young man at Newtonbrook: "I had a dream and passion to play professional football" and acknowledged that "No one makes the journey alone."

"It's truly an honor to be inducted into the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame."

The retired tailback exited the stage with the million-watt smile that has propelled him from professional football in Regina and Ottawa to a career in commercials, television shows, and movies in Toronto—the kind of warmth and radiance that lights up every room that he enters.

Emitting their own special brand of radiance was a pair of Future Hall of Famers honored on Thursday evening.

Black introduced Team Ontario field and box lacrosse player Taylor Thornley. The Grade 10 Bill Crothers Secondary School student in the Elite Athlete program and "lax phenom" was presented with an \$850 cheque by Bursary Sponsor Lindsay Strom of Royal LePage.

The second honoree was former Aurora Junior A Tiger and current NCAA D1 commit Andreas "Mikro" Mikrogianakis who is playing for the Brooks Bandits of the British Columbia Hockey League prior to joining the Rochester Institute of Technology Tigers in September, 2026.

Mikrogianakis—a graduate of Cardinal Carter Catholic High School—delivered a video message from BC. His sister, Talia, accepted an \$850 cheque on his behalf from Bursary Sponsor Stu Bundy, President of the Aurora Optimist Club.

Black moved effortlessly from the future stars to the present stars assembled and praised Heather Morning as 'the heartbeat of Girls' Hockey.'

The Emcee added that Coach Morning 'lifted an entire generation of players and 'Tonight is all about the Morning.'

The back tables at the Mansion were populated by a generation of Central York Panthers players and 'Never Too Late' Hockey Program enthusiasts who commingled and offered booming bouts of applause and enthusiastic bench shrieking to support their beloved mentor.

Coach Morning admitted humbly at the outset of her address that she 'was surprised and honored to be inducted into the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame.'

She thanked her 'husband John' a great coach in his own right and such a great dad to our three children.'

She also thanked her many coaches and acknowledged Reid's prior insight.

'As Robert mentioned earlier, 'No one makes the journey alone.'

Coach Morning reflected on 'My summer mornings of working out at the baseball diamond with my dad hitting me groundballs and flyballs for hours at the park' and 'My mom driving me everywhere for hockey before GPS and us getting lost or going down the wrong way of a one-way street or running late and having to put on my hockey equipment in the back of a Volkswagen Bug.'

She also reflected fondly on the early days of her daughters playing hockey and how 'they insisted on wearing dresses to their practices.'

'I put the rule in place that the dresses had to be short enough to tuck in their hockey pants.'

Morning applauded 'The 'Never Too Late' participants who are a family of sorts' which was met with hearty applause from the 40-60-year-olds who have taken up the game later in life and have developed a heightened appreciation for the game.

Morning mentioned in jest that one of the benefits of the program is that 'the new players don't scream as many things at the hockey rink now that they know how the game is played and how hard it is to play.'

Morning closed her upbeat and energetic address by expressing her love of the game and noted that she 'hoped to continue to coach for many years to come.'

Her concluding sentiments elicited enthusiastic applause, especially from the dozens assembled who have been so profoundly impacted by the legendary coach and skills instructor.

After Morning's poignant performance, Black referred to the fourth Inductee as 'The King' and noted how appropriate it was that 'Kris won the King Clancy Trophy in 1996 for significant contributions to community.'

Black noted that King 'in his executive capacity as the NHL's Senior Vice President of Operations' has 'watched more hockey than anyone alive' and he closed his introduction of the rugged, 14-year NHL veteran with, 'Tonight, we put Kris King in the spotlight: Warrior, Leader, Gentleman, and to offer the best words a guy can hear' A Great Dude.'

King thanked 'Blackie or Big Rod but for those of us who know him, it's Wee Rod.'

After smuggling in that phallic jibe much to the delight of the assembly, King marveled at his red jacket and noted '44 Regular still

fits me.?

Indeed, the 59-year-old NHL executive looked like he could still lace 'em up and the former Winnipeg Jets captain shifted to some humorous barbs directed towards his daughter, Danielle, who submitted his nomination papers to the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame.

He stared down at her and said lovingly, 'Danielle, you little turd.?

King reflected with great fondness about setting up 'a hockey house with Paula to raise our three kids in Aurora.?

He expressed his surprise upon discovering there was a second Toronto Maple Leaf family living on their new street.

'As it turned out, we bought on the same street as my Coach Mike Murphy. Unfortunately, Murph got fired in my first year with the Leafs?he shouldn't have played me on the fourth line so much.?

The easy-going relationship between King and the other former NHLer inductees in the audience? Murphy, Mike Kitchen, and Bob Wall?was evident.

King's amusing and often ribald anecdotes brought down the house and his acceptance speech served as a climactic performance for the evening.

He reflected on 'Hockey careers as a series of good luck and big breaks.

In Peterborough, when I was with the Petes, I met Paula. When Paula first met my teammates, she referred to us as the idiots. But she finally agreed to go out on a date with me. We're so happy to be grandparents. Paula has been the rock behind my career. She was always positive, even when things weren't going well.?

King saved some special fun-loving invective for his former teammate and HNIC commentator Glenn Healy.

After Heals dropped in a few good-natured and sardonic gems about the Inductee during the video introduction, it was King's turn to even the score. He chuckled about his times in the NHL with Healy and didn't mince words: 'He was such an as\*\*\*\*\*. Cujo played all the time and he didn't. And I was stuck on the bench on the fourth line so Heals and I had lots of time to talk together at the end of the Leafs bench.?

A rousing and hearty round of applause greeted King as he exited the stage and Black closed the show with contemporary observations and insights.

The renowned broadcaster praised the Toronto Blue Jays World Series squad and 'their love for one another. We saw all of these players lay it all on the line. At a stadium that has undergone a \$350 Million renovation, who knew that a ball could get stuck in the bottom of an outfield wall??

Black praised the four Inductees, especially 'for their love of sports? and encouraged the audience and the Inductees to 'Celebrate tonight. Those red coats will look great at Tom and Jerry's?.It's clear that Aurora does build champions.?

By Jim StewartLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter