

## Aurora Sports Hall of Fame's Class of 2026 celebrated at Town Hall ceremony



The Aurora Sports Hall of Fame's Class of 2026 was revealed at a public ceremony at Town Hall on Tuesday night.

ASHoF Nomination Committee Chair Rocco Morsillo presented the inductees, local lawmakers and members of the public alike at last Tuesday's Council meeting.

Morsillo introduced to the assembly long-time AMHA President and Coach Joe Bentolila; long distance runner George Biondic; Team Canada Paralympic Gold Medalist goaltender Paul Rosen; former Tampa Bay Lightning and Boston Bruin centre Shayne Stevenson; and the first team to be enshrined in the ASHoF?The Aurora Church Dodgers Hockey Club. Due to illness, Rosen was absent from the proceedings.

After the formalities in the Chamber, a procession of red-jacketed Hall of Famers and blue-jacketed administrators accompanied by families and friends reconvened outside Town Hall for a follow-up celebratory press conference.

Bentolila, Biondi, Stevenson, and Aurora Church Dodgers team reps were presented with their red ASHoF golf shirts?the ?first stage of induction,? as described by President Javed Khan.

The long-time President addressed over fifty attendees and described the event as ?literally showcasing the amazing members of this Class.?

?It's all about celebrating each of the inductees over the next five months leading up to their Induction. Most importantly, it's about the community coming together and celebrating.?

As the Emcee of the presentation to Town Council, Morsillo enjoyed the celebratory vibe in the Chamber.

?It was an overwhelming sensation?memories of all the nomination packages that our committee processed came rushing back to me. It reminded me of all the accomplishments that were presented by nominators. To hear the applause in the Chamber for each Inductee was incredible. It felt special. All the photos we presented?these builders and athletes realize how special they are after giving so much. They are a great group of people.?

Recently-retired AMHA President Joe Bentolila appreciated Morsillo's description about the greatness of the inductees, but noted modestly: ?This is so humbling.?

?It's been all about working with so many dedicated people, but also being inducted with people who are filled with community

spirit. It'll be great to hear their stories on the Induction evening. It's a fantastic feeling here tonight?it's great to be recognized for my efforts, but I was surrounded by great people who have all bettered sport in Aurora. My goal was always to help the children of the community.?

Equally-connected to his community is long-distance runner George Biondic who hopes his accomplishments inspire others.

?It's an honor and I'm going to be an emotional guy at the Induction Ceremony. What I like most about this honor is how it could provide encouragement for the new generation of runners. They see us as pioneers. Beyond the younger generation, I hope we serve as inspiration to Seniors, too. People will read about our stories and I hope it inspires retirees. My message to them would be, 'Whatever inspires you, do it!' as a way of finding purpose in retirement.?

Finding common purpose was at the heart of the Aurora Church Dodgers hockey experience and club rep Tom McPherson described the team's connectivity.

?This was all about being with people with common interests and virtues. That's what we do as human beings. We share community. A complete cross-section of Aurora was in the Church Dodgers. On Sunday mornings, we'd have the visitors' dressing room. We played til noon and we had the best storytellers who would tell stories til 2:00. We had so much fun.?

The 93-year-old raconteur was resplendent in this yellow and purple Church Dodgers jacket and the original club member bemoaned a golf game that started his day: 'It's been a busy day. Sadly, I didn't shoot my age today on the golf course ? had to settle for a 96.?

Shayne Stevenson, drafted 17th overall by the Boston Bruins in 1990, reflected fondly on both the call he received from the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame and chatting with his rep hockey coach outside the Town Hall on Tuesday.

?The call from Rocco was super special?he left a message on my phone to call him. Sure enough?when I called him back, he gave me the good news. Tonight brought back great memories for me-- seeing Lowell McClenny and Colin Graham and taking photos with my two coaches. Lowell made me his team Captain when I was twelve years old. It was at that moment with my rep coaches that I couldn't believe forty years have passed. We were even on Sportsbeat TV together. Having my family with me today to share these memories makes me very happy, too. I'm very lucky.?

Features on each of the Inductees will appear in The Auroran beginning at the end of September and will run weekly through October as lead-ups to the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame Induction Evening on Thursday, November 5.

By Jim StewartLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter

(CORRECTION ? In the caption of last week's introductory story on the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame's Class of 2026, Paul Rosen's name contained a typo. We regret the error)