

Aurorans are invited to hoist a few pints to celebrate Optimists, youth



By Brock Weir

It's time to raise a glass for the Optimist Club of Aurora.

The local service club, which dedicates countless hours of volunteer work and much needed funds to the youth of Aurora, was recently named once again as the "Top Club" in Central Ontario, covering from Niagara to Barrie.

This is certainly not the first time the Aurora Optimists have been singled out taking the top prize, and although club president Lou Crone says they are "a little bit embarrassed" to be repeat offenders, it is an "incredible honour" they are happy to accept.

"There are 30 to 40 clubs in Central Ontario and to be repeatedly designated as the most active, best club for working with youth is just an incredible honour," he says, noting their activities are what set them apart from the crowd.

"It is the things like the showcase hockey tournament we put on for house league kids that might not have the opportunity to be in a tournament. We have a skills tournament for the fastest skater, the best slap shot, and it is an opportunity for our average kids to excel. We also put on the chess tournament every year so even the non-athletic kids have an opportunity to thrive."

Behind the scenes, the Optimists also provide sponsorship for arts and drama programs, and reach out to a wide variety of interests students have. Beyond mere interests, they also take pride in their partnership with the York Regional Police which takes kids who are known to police, and provide mentorship opportunities with police by going on outward bound canoe trips.

To celebrate their success "and to help lay the groundwork for future programs" the Optimists are inviting the community to come together and raise a few celebratory glasses this Friday for their inaugural Microbrewery Beer Tasting Evening.

The fundraiser, which will be held this Friday, April 4, from 6 to 11 p.m. at the Aurora Cultural Centre, will bring together the distinct flavours of a number of microbrewers both local, and from across Ontario and into Quebec, including Red Falcon Premium Ale out of Stouffville and Lake of Bays Brewing Company. Food will also be provided by local restaurants.

Optimists were inspired to bring a beer tasting event such as this to Aurora after attending a similar event by the Rotary Club of Richmond Hill.

"We thought it would be great to bring that to Aurora and make it our own," says Optimist Kathryn Yardley, co-organizer of Friday's event. "We just know the broad appeal beer has, especially the popularity of craft breweries now. The idea was instantly accepted by our members and everyone is really excited about it. We're hoping it will become an annual tradition."

Putting the event together, however, took some legwork and after it got the okay from the Optimist members, it was time to hit the web and recruit participating breweries, bringing together eight makers of craft beers.

?This is all going to the youth of Aurora,? says co-organizer and past-president Terry Sherin. ?I have been around Aurora a long time to know there are a lot of beer drinkers here. I went to them, told them about what we planned, and they said it would be a great event to have because there is nothing like that around here.?