

Aurora's inaugural Pride Festival kicks off month of celebration



Aurora Town Square's Performance Hall was packed on Saturday evening as the Aurora Community Band, the Town of Aurora, and community partners hosted the Town's first-ever Pride Festival.

The brainchild of Gord Shephard and Warren Fetterly of the Aurora Community Band, the evening featured welcoming remarks in the outdoor square, an art sale featuring works of Society of York Region Artists and Pine Tree Potters Guild members, display tables from community partners, an appearance by drag queen Ivory Towers, all culminating in back-to-back performances from the Borealis Big Band and Aurora Community Band.

The bands performed an array of music tied in with the theme of Pride.

"On behalf of the Mayor and Council, I want to welcome everybody here and thank you for your attendance and supporting Pride Month here in this community," said Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese. "We are a diverse community, we're an inclusive community? it's in our strategy and it's just good common sense."

Mayor Tom Mrakas, unable to attend the event due to a conference in Ottawa, sent video greetings. He praised organizers and participants, including York Pride, in their efforts to help "build a culture of inclusion across the Region."

"We're so grateful to have your energy and leadership here in Aurora tonight," he said. "You know, this Festival is really about celebration, and it's about love, and saying loud and clear that everyone belongs in Aurora exactly as they are. Enjoy every minute of the music you are making, and the fun, and let's make this the start of something truly special in our Town."

While it's hoped that Saturday's event will only grow in Aurora in the coming years, it is the start of a full month of celebrations York Region-wide.

The York Pride Festival will take place in Newmarket on June 21 and 22.

Organizers are intent on making it the "ultimate 2SLGBTQ+ celebration in York Region on York Pride's milestone 25th anniversary, bringing together thousands of people for a weekend of music, entertainment, food, and interactive experiences."

Planned for June 21 are main stage entertainment at Newmarket's Riverwalk Commons, featuring all-Canadian performers, including "drag superstars, musicians, DJs and cultural acts, a gaming zone, vendor village, kids zone, and food truck alley."

The York Pride Parade will be the highlight of June 21 as it makes its way down Main Street Newmarket from 6 ? 7.30 p.m.

?What began as a grassroots initiative in the early 2000s has blossomed into a landmark event, showcasing York Pride's evolution into a federally recognized organization leading one of Canada's fastest-growing Pride festivals,? say organizers. ?In 2025, Newmarket is set to welcome over 3,000 marchers and thousands of spectators, all gathering to witness a dazzling display of love, unity, and inclusion. Featuring brand-new floats, electrifying performances, and an ever-expanding lineup of community groups, the parade is a powerful symbol of visibility, progress, and the ongoing fight for equality.?

York Pride lead Jacob Gal underscored the importance of this milestone ? and of Aurora's first foray into a Pride festival ? as the Borealis Big Band finished their set.

?We're celebrating all together on a new milestone with Aurora, celebrating its first Pride Festival,? he said. ?I think the biggest thing for us here at York Pride, and with all of York Region, our nine cities and towns, is to build a region where it really comes down to three things: Building respect, educating, and connecting. We really want to make sure that we're creating space for people, but we're meeting people in the middle, and where they're at. Not everybody understands our community. There are a number of reasons why people don't easily connect. It may be an upbringing, it may be the AIDS epidemic, it may be the religious views. But there is enough space for all of us, and I know that the work that all of our agencies are doing, the municipalities, it's really just to make sure that everybody feels like they belong, feels safe in their community, and this is why Pride is important.

?It's for everybody, and it's a time for people to connect with each other, love one another, and just support.?

For more on York Pride's plans for the month of June, visit yorkpride.ca/events.

By Brock Weir