

Blues and Cruise to help breathe new life into old musical friends



By Brock Weir

Giving young and emerging musicians a venue and an all-important audience has been a long-time mandate of the Aurora Winter Blues Festival, but this summer organizers are focusing on being with these young musicians from the ground floor.

As the Aurora Winter Blues Festival (AWBF) takes on the summer with this September's inaugural Blues and Cruise, the Festival is joining forces with the Optimist Club of Aurora and The Arts music store in collecting used musical instruments for local students who can only dream of holding a musical instrument of their own.

"A lot of music programs don't exist in grade schools anymore," says Jamie Macdonald, co-founder of the AWBF. "In high school, students basically have to bring their own musical instruments if they want to participate in the band programs and that was a bit of an eye-opener for us. Our son was heavily involved in the music program at Aurora High School and we started doing various fundraisers to help offset the cost not only of the trips, but to purchase some of the instruments as well. They are fairly expensive and through The Arts and other music shops, they have rentals, but anyone who has a financial hardship, it is a tough decision for a family to make."

Enter the Optimists.

This year's Blues and Cruise will include a donation drive where any and all attendees will be able to drop off their old musical instruments, regardless of condition, to pay it forward. Kimberley Kerr, president of the Aurora Optimists, contacted the AWBF and said they wanted to put an additional focus on music complimenting their existing youth programs.

The seeds were planted this past winter and AWBF organizers saw a perfect fit.

"We have had a long-standing relationship with Patty Keele, owner of The Arts, and she has wanted to make greater inroads to local schools as well," says Mr. Macdonald. "It is a joint collaboration bringing in Patty and The Arts, and Kimberley Kerr. Jointly, we're going to be putting more focus on how we can help local schools and one effort is our drive here. We can put these musical instruments back into schools. To augment our existing Youth in Music programs with instruments is great.

"The Arts does repairs and we're looking at instruments that might need some light refurbishing that Patty would help out with as well."

Blues and Cruise takes over Aurora's Town Park on September 2. Headlining the event will be award-winning blues guitarist Jack de Keyzer. The Cruise will be handled by the Aurora Car Club, who will be filling the park's ball diamond with their collective fleet of

classic cars.

?We are extremely excited about this,? said Mr. Macdonald. ?Jack is probably one of the foremost award-winning blues artists in Canada and just a real road warrior. He does about 200+ gigs a year and we're quite excited to have him come in. Our mandate is to showcase local youth bands, so we have Graham Young leading us in on that night and during the intermission The Arts will have a younger band coming in, so we're quite excited about that as well.

?There is a little bit of everything for everybody that night.?