

BROCK'S BANTER: Another one for the memory bank

By Brock Weir

I was a non-believer, at first.

Earlier this month, Council entered into a marathon debate about a particular non-issue; specifically, the non-issue I wrote about last week. Namely: the ins and outs of who should take on the responsibilities of organizing an outdoor screening at Town Park, who should take the credit for it, and who may or may not have been standing in the way of it proceeding as envisioned by the people who first floated the idea.

In his initial pitch to his fellow lawmakers, Councillor John Abel pitched it as an "I remember when" moment along the lines of Canadians fondly recalling where they were participating in Canada's Centennial, watching Neil Armstrong taking that first small step on the moon through a grainy television feed, the Canada-Russia hockey series the same way, only in colour, watching Joe Carter's home run and, finally, Mike Weir winning the Masters.

He was, as thousands of Aurorans who turned out to Town Park on Saturday night now know, referring to the final farewell concert of the iconic Tragically Hip.

Sceptical that it would be as monumental a moment as the Councillor suggested, it nevertheless seemed like something that would resonate with some hardcore music fans in the community but, not having been fully bitten by the Tragically Hip bug when I was in the full bloom of youth, I had my doubts it would be remembered for years down the road.

Personally, I have my own "I remember when" moments.

My first three happened in relatively quick succession: in 1992, being allowed to stay up late for one-night-only to watch Johnny Carson's last episode of *The Tonight Show*, 1993 being dragged out of bed to see the aforementioned Mr. Carter take his enthusiastic victory lap after his home run (but not the home run itself), and being somberly told after school one afternoon in 1994 of John Candy's untimely death.

Fast forward a few years, and there are vivid memories of the evening of August 30, 1997 when, flipping channels after a delicious meal of Chinese take-out (and I still remember everything that was on the plate that night), and stumbling upon breaking news on the eventually fatal car crash of Diana, Princess of Wales, and staying up for updates on her variously-reported condition.

Heading out for school on September 11, 2001, my initial concerns that morning were looking snappy in my olive-green button-down and fresh coif for Grade 10 picture day. How quickly that changed.

Then, of course, there were the back-to-back Gold Medal wins for Canada's Olympic Hockey teams, the Queen's two most recent Jubilees, and other very happy events.

You all have your own; they will be great moments of national and international significance, moments of sadness, and personal family and career triumphs, and they will also be the small, insignificant things that have an importance understood by you and you alone.

I did not anticipate the final performance of the Tragically Hip entering my personal pantheon of great moments, yet here we are. After seeing so many local events, be they driven by the Town or citizens at large, receive lukewarm support from the public, despite ample enthusiasm, advertising and outreach, I wasn't sure what to expect.

From my standpoint, our articles covering the event as it began to take shape received a healthy and encouraging reception, but that word-of-mouth excitement so integral to the success of events like these seemed neither overwhelming nor obvious.

That apparent lack of buzz, combined with over a week of forecasts predicting weather threatening to put the kibosh on the entire affair, made it seem like a bit of a crap shoot.

But, as so many of you can attest, it was anything but a crap shoot.

Despite the mildly ominous skies, close to 3,000 people of all ages flocked to Town Park to take in the final Hip concert and an astonishingly energetic performance from lead singer Gord Downie, which was nothing short of an inspiration.

While many in the crowd were undoubtedly fans of the Hip, I got the sense from a good number of people in the crowd were there for reasons other than their greatest hits. There was a sense of wanting to be there to pay tribute to Downie the man, rather than the musician.

There was a desire of those who counted the Tragically Hip as playing a pivotal role on the soundtrack of their lives to bring their own young ones to the concert to show them what made the group so special to them.

Still others came out to hear the opening act, the wonderful Spencer MacKenzie band, or grab some local grub whipped up by the Optimist Club of Aurora, or corn grilled up by Mayor and Council.

Overall, however, the prevailing impression I received was that, whatever drove them to Town Park in the first place, it was an experience they did not want to have around their living room, watching on their computer, phone or tablet wherever they might be, or seeing a recap on the news.

It was an experience they wanted to have as a community and that's exactly what unfolded. One hopes in the lead-up to Canada's 150th, Town Hall and community groups alike look for similar opportunities to bring further experiences as these to the community and smooth out the process in making it a reality.

You might not be able to catch lightning in a bottle, but sometimes it can strike twice.