

BROCK'S BANTER: Circling the Drain

By Brock Weir

You all know that feeling, the thrill of stumbling upon a winning formula.

Instant success can bring instant gratification, but it can also breed a bit of complacency. At the inevitable downswing of success, most of us take stock, give ourselves a shake, and get down to business to figure out exactly what went wrong and right the ship. This must have been the same feeling experienced by some of the more heritage-minded people in Aurora who threw open their homes and businesses for Doors Open Aurora.

While this event ostensibly celebrates the steady, consistent, and unwavering 'built' members of our community, their annual day has joggled around the spring and summer calendar almost necessitating Dramamine to keep up.

Despite their best intentions, organizers behind Doors Open Aurora 2012 were facing a problem. Holding the event in July, which had become a fairly recent invention, just wasn't working. Numbers were steadily trending down after setting their record in 2010. Part of the reason, they contended, was Aurorans are often away in July, basking in the comforts of their cottages or on holidays in further flung parts of the world. Or, it was just too damn hot to leave their air conditioned homes to truly appreciate homes built before the birth of the Maytag Man, the Patron Saint of the Season.

After the sweltering heat of last year's Doors Open, I was tempted to err on the side of comfort, but it seems others felt the rest of Aurora might feel the same way. 2012 numbers plummeted and the organizers faced a problem.

'How do we get our numbers up and still keep focus?'

The answer was simple: Move it to August. People are back from their cottages to get their kids ready for the upcoming school year, get themselves in a good place mentally before heading back to the regular working grind?and there's a much better chance of finding even the slightest of breezes.

They bit the bullet, changed the dates, recorded record numbers at almost every stop on the 16-site tour. With this in mind, they spent the lazy remaining days of summer basking in the glow of undoubted success.

You'd think the formula that brought in busloads of tourists from all around Ontario, would be a winning formula to stick with, right? I'd thought so too, but if we put money on it, we'd all be up the creek.

According to a recommendation coming out of the October 9 Council meeting and up for discussion at Council this week, the new plan is getting back in the water and circling the July drain. The reason? It was the same day as the Toromont King Dragon Boat Race for the United Way. In King Township. Apparently, this 'conflicted with Council and staff's ability to volunteer for the event.' Considering Council representation at the Dragon Boat Festival (in King) was significantly lower this year than in years past, perhaps the reverse might be true.

Another reason? Both the Aurora Public Library and the Aurora Cultural Centre agree August is 'not a favourable month' due to scheduling conflicts.

'They have suggested that an event in the month of July is preferable,' concludes the report. 'Therefore, it is recommended that the Heritage Advisory Committee take this into consideration when planning the date of the 2014 event.'

The original concept of Doors Open was to literally throw open the doors of places of heritage and architectural interest that might not otherwise be open to the public. This principle was exemplified this year in such cases as Horton Place, the Rising Sun Masonic Lodge, the Absalom Blaker House, the Benjamin Stephenson House and, if it wasn't pulled off the roster at the last minute, the old Aurora Armoury at the corner of Mosely and Larmont.

While the participation of the Aurora Public Library, the Aurora Cultural Centre, and the Aurora Farmers' Market are welcome additions to any festival, one can partake in the many great offerings all year round. In my highly unscientific poll taken as I made the rounds on August 17, although many new residents of Aurora took Doors Open as an excuse to make their first move in cultivating a new and wonderful relationship with these public institutions like the Library and Cultural Centre, the majority of the people were drawn to the architecture and historical significance offered by the buildings on offer, particularly the beautiful surroundings of Aurora's many places of worship.

Don't get me wrong; the Library and the Centre provided invaluable, interactive, and highly entertaining tie-ins that fully complemented the event. On a personal level, I even took part in dabbing some paint on the community art project at the Cultural Centre, a thoroughly risky move considering I can't even draw a straight line, as well as leaving a few thoughts in the video time capsule organized by Cindy and Reccia at the Library. As I put a few brush strokes on the canvas (and going back for more to fix the dog's breakfast I made), I was told with wonder that an entire busload of tourists from Markham made the trip to Aurora and decided

to make the Aurora Cultural Centre their base on their Aurora tour, going as far as setting up a makeshift picnic lunch on their grounds. And another bus was expected. The wonder stemmed from that being unprecedented in recent Doors Open History. Staffing the August date might be a challenge, as might finding the right amount and blend of volunteers, but it might ? just might ? be worth the extra effort before consigning the lessons learned this year onto the scrapheap of history.