

BROCK'S BANTER: Kickstarter Aurora

By Brock Weir

It has been a very good year for Kickstarter.

Chances are, if you hadn't heard of this online service 12 months ago, where people can essentially make a pitch to the world on why they should part with even a single dollar of their hard-earned cash to fund their pet project or a good cause, you've heard of it now. This is due in no small measure to 'Crackstarter' the infamous campaign waged by Gawker.com to secure \$200,000 for the alleged video of Toronto Mayor Rob Ford getting his jollies on the crack pipe as known criminals looked on.

Needless to say, this quickly became a crowded bandwagon. No matter how the chips fell, I'm sure it was welcome publicity for the online donation machine. That is not to say they were ever lacking in publicity.

They got some buzz as a 'crowdsourcing' project was launched to fund a semi-reboot of the cult TV show Veronica Mars. That was a positive and cameras are now rolling.

On the other side of the margin, there was backlash when established people in the entertainment industry like Spike Lee took to the website asking for donations for their upcoming projects. In some cases, a donation would secure you a mention in the film's closing credits as a contributor, but perhaps some of the backlash proves the adage that too many producers spoils the broth. Or something like that.

With the positives and the negatives, there is also the category of derision when a celebrity or notable's campaign quickly becomes a shambles and a source for widespread mockery, such as the case when a well-heeled entertainment scion asked for upwards of \$32,000 to produce a four minute music video for she and her sister.

The point of all this?

Kickstarter will be available in Canada next month. Whether or not we have Mayor Ford to thank for this, perhaps a basket of fruit would be in order anyway as this has the power to revolutionize the way Canadians do business. The possibilities are endless.

The amount of time in Aurora alone which could have been saved if Kickstarter made the northbound leap over the border years ago is staggering.

Consider for a moment the fair-weather Friends of the Petch House. From all outward appearances, the results of their efforts and those of the Town are clearly evident, but it was certainly a long time coming. The Friends waited until the eleventh hour to present a workable proposal. The cost to the taxpayers, however, was significant.

How different it could have been if those who wanted to save it, secure it, and ultimately restore it set up a project for interested parties to fund the project. It could have very well found a practical use by now.

Of course, if that was a possibility, an equal danger would have been a counter-campaign funding moving the logs, marinating for years in a broth of urine and guano, to a shady toothpick factory. But, of course, you have to take the good with the bad.

What about revitalizing Aurora's Downtown Core? Wouldn't it be much simpler to let those who are interested in revitalizing the area just get on with it, making the investment in programs such as the proposed Façade Improvement Project, and allowing Council to direct funds where necessary or desired?

It would surely be easier to get all interested parties on the same page at the same time. Two decades of talking about it and two decades of inaction does not a leap forward make.

Then there is the perennial issue of trails; a laudable project, to be sure, for infrastructure which is enjoyed by so many. The works of Aurora's Trails and Active Transportation Committee is to be commended ? as is the regular support they receive by the equally perennial group of Councillors who so often find themselves on the side of the advocates, but therein lies the problem.

The public fight for a continuous network of trails cannot be fought outside the committee room by Klaus Wehrenberg alone. For a man who has become synonymous with advocacy for the trails, he is, rightly or wrongly, often met with a brick wall by the Municipality and the Region.

He had the idea to do his own version of a Kickstarter through a Trails Donation Account which, while ultimately considered, was certainly met with a lukewarm response.

If the passion is there, this might be a golden opportunity for trail users to put their money where their feet are and show their support if they're not willing to step up to the podium and back up the one man band apparently represented in Mr. Wehrenberg. Let's not let the buck stop there.

Think of the possibilities like the Aurora Farmers' Market, which were denied a \$1,000 grant to rent the band shell for three special event days this year because they have received the same grant three times within the past five years.

Or the Aurora Garden and Horticultural Society which were denied the same grant for the same reason which would have aided them to rent space from the Aurora Cultural Centre for their annual show and to cover costs of renting the Royal Canadian Legion for their regular meetings.

Or another \$1,000 request from St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School for picnic tables to host a Special Olympics track and field meet for 15 high schools because, in part, it was not seen as 'serving the residents of Aurora.'

Well, to be fair, feasibility studies and 'community spaces for youth' don't fund themselves.