

BROCK'S BANTER: Lessons Learned

By Brock Weir

Now that the dust has settled in Aurora, what have we learned over the past week?

A little over a week ago, people across Town ? well, at least those who cared, according to our less-than-stellar voter turnout statistics -- woke up with a degree of uncertainty over just who would rise to the tops of the polls in a few short hours.

We all had our predictions of who would win. Some of us went as far as having a list of hopefuls. Well, let's hope most of us had a list of hopefuls ahead of time before going into the voting booth, wielding the Sharpie and marking up our respective ballots willy-nilly. But, there were always the few who have a hard time differentiating between predicted candidates and hopeful candidates ? as blogs across Newmarket can attest.

While voter turnout was, once again, disappointingly low, I am having a hard time deciding on what might have contributed to that downward trend. There was, of course, the lack of a clear cut election issue on which residents could fall on one side or another. These issues, as has been the case in elections past, often serve to galvanize Aurora's core group of active, engaged residents to get out the vote and convince their neighbours who deserves the black blotch next to their name.

Perhaps it was a lack of choice amid an overabundance of choice that did voters in.

On election day, I went outside polling stations east of Bayview Avenue and west of Yonge Street in an effort to see what clicked with voters as they made their exits, civic duty done. What I found was a pretty even split amongst voters on who deserved to win Aurora's top job.

Although some predicted there was going to be a clear geographic trend in who voted for Geoff Dawe versus John Gallo ? and the numbers do indicate that to be somewhat the case ? the people I talked to presented a slightly different story.

When it came to our mayoral candidates, some were willing to say how they voted.

For those who gave their vote to John Gallo, Helen, who voted at Hartman Public School, spoke about viewing him as a ?little bit more progressive? in his ideas than Geoff Dawe, who they gave credit to for having a little bit more ?life experience.? Those in the Gallo camp voting west of Yonge Street, such as Vince, cited him as a ?nice, refreshing possible change for the future? and said they would like to see him on the ballot in 2018, if he was unsuccessful this time around.

Voters for Geoff Dawe, on the other hand, cited a satisfaction with how Aurora had progressed over the last four years and wanted things to continue on that path.

?I like the job that Geoff Dawe has done, so I voted for him again because I feel he has done a good job,? said Pam at Devin's Drive Public School. Simple and to the point. Eleanor, who voted at Rick Hansen Public School, had a similar view. ?I think he does a pretty good job. I think he has good political acuity and I think he has good business sense, and I am pretty happy with the direction the Town is taking.?

The decision wasn't so clear cut for other voters, however.

?Voting for the Mayor was really difficult because you either go with an older version of a man who is corporate or a younger guy who is corporate,? said Laurie at Devins Drive. ?It was really hard to decide. I was hoping there would be a little bit more choice.? Laurie declined to answer whether youth ultimately trumped age when she made her final decision.

TOO MUCH CHOICE ? OR A GOOD PROBLEM TO HAVE?

On my rounds last Monday I encountered one Council candidate who was making the rounds as well. In a brief chat outside of Hartman Public School, he jokingly asked if he had my vote. While I would never say who I ultimately voted for, I told him the truth.

After hemming and hawing for several days of who, in the end would make my top eight, I found it pretty easy to finalize my list of top 10 or top 11 Council candidates.

With very few exceptions, I think the majority of the 28 candidates had very interesting perspectives to bring to the table. With these perspectives came very valuable skillsets and life experiences that would have been an asset to Council.

Knocking my short list of 10 or 11 down to a Top 8, however, was a decidedly more difficult chore.

When it comes to the municipal races, I often vote for a mix of people, all of whom I think are capable, but who represent different viewpoints on matters. Having healthy discussion and debate around the Council table is always a plus and, more often than not, it leads to more reasoned and considered decisions that ultimately have a wider benefit to the Town as a whole.

Occasionally in this business it is tempting to vote for the combination of Councillors that might make for the most entertaining slate

? after all, it is good for readership ? but that fun can only last so long and yes, I did resist.

ACCENTUATING THE POSITIVE

When I look back over the course of the 2014 Election Campaign, I think one of the main things I will take away from this is not simply who was elected, or not elected, or the results of the ward system and Council size referenda, but Aurora voters' firm rejection of negative campaigning and overall ? to borrow a phrase from Geoff Dawe ? B.S.

Both mayoral candidates are to be commended for their overall positive campaigns. Both made it very clear on what they offered voters, what they hoped to achieve if voters put their trust in them, and how they hoped to make their respective visions a reality. With the possible exception of a negative campaign ad from one camp, or bizarre innuendo launched from another campaign in the heat of a debate, Aurorans should be grateful that our local campaigns did not devolve into the mayhem of our neighbours to the south, or the bitter mudslinging of our neighbours to the north.

The same can be said of our whopping 28 Council candidates. Again, the majority of those running stuck to the positive, selling themselves and their vision without resorting to bringing down anybody else.

Monday's results were indicative of this.

John Abel, Sandra Humfries, Michael Thompson, Jeff Thom, Wendy Gaertner, Harold Kim, Tom Mrakas, and Paul Pirri all ran exceedingly positive campaigns that evidently resonated with voters. For the five incumbents, digging down into the dirt and lobbing a clump across the room at an opponent could have been very tempting, as it would have been for other candidates who might have felt they had nothing to lose.

ROUND OF APPLAUSE

For everyone who put their name forward this time around, you are to be commended for putting yourselves out there, taking a risk, and putting forward your ideas. Whether you were lucky or not last Monday, don't let the results dissuade you into shrinking away from the political process. To borrow a phrase from one of our columnists, stay involved, stay informed, and don't be afraid to come out again in 2018.