

BROCK'S BANTER: The "Made in Aurora" Factor

By Brock Weir

Apparently I am a newbie.

And apparently there is absolutely nothing I can do about it.

The only solution, so I am told, is to wait it out.

I reached this conclusion ? or, rather, I had this conclusion thrust upon me ? last week by a person who considers herself, and takes great pride in, being considered ?Old Aurora.?

This, despite having called Aurora my hometown for just over 10 years after making the treacherous, perilous journey from the hinterlands of Newmarket.

?So, how long do you need to live in Aurora to be truly considered an Auroran?? I asked with mock exasperation.

?30 years,? came the instant, matter-of-fact reply.

This conversation took place on the friendliest of terms, with plenty of laughs to go around, but it only reinforced my belief that Aurora is, has always been and, yes, will always be a curious beast unto itself.

When I first moved here, I was struck by the different values held by the people of Aurora compared to their ? our ? northern neighbours.

At the time, there seemed to be a strong resistance from Aurorans against growth compared to the relatively relaxed attitude of Newmarket residents. Working hand in hand with this was the ideal held by many residents that Aurora's ?small town feel? should be retained at all costs, despite the demands of growth and, well, to be blunt, the reality that Aurora is no longer a small town.

Another curious factor was the desire and ideal to find a ?Made in Aurora? solution to many of life's most common problems.

Despite there being easily workable and adaptable templates to solve many of said problems, there seemed to be a compulsion to dissect these models and cobble together hybrids that were somehow better because they were, in the end, ?Made in Aurora.?

This is a phenomenon I have derided once or twice in this space previously and, in recent years, it is a phenomenon which has started to recede into memory. But, and although I am loath to say this, if there is any time for a Made in Aurora solution, this is it.

LEARNING FROM OTHERS

Questions continue to mount over the future of Aurora's Highland Gate Golf Course, but there are at least two certainties: 1) the golf course is closed, and 2) and the land owners are looking for alternative uses. Everything else is up in the air.

This is causing some consternation among the many people living in homes encircling the over 80-year-old course.

While upset amongst the residents in question is quite understandable, no one should be surprised at the situation. After all, although Aurora is a growing community, is it really a community that can support five golf courses completely within its borders, with a sixth currently under development? (Not to mention a further handful or two within a stone's throw of our respective boundaries with King, Richmond Hill and Whitchurch-Stouffville).

Despite the majority of Aurora's highest profile golf tournaments taking place on courses well beyond our borders, the answer is, logically, no ? and now it is the reality.

The question on everybody's lips is, ?Will this be another Glenway?? Glenway is still a situation that is reverberating throughout Newmarket, and now these shockwaves have headed south.

Aurora, on the other hand, has the ability to learn from Newmarket's situation.

It shouldn't be a foregone conclusion that the future of Highland Gate lies in residential development as Glenway's did, but it should be considered as more than a realistic possibility. To this end, Aurora has caught it early. The business and land in question have yet to be sold, and this time should be used wisely to plan a course of action.

This course of action should include residential engagement right off the bat between the two levels of government that have powers within their respective quivers to help guide the future of the course. The Town deserves kudos for taking early action in keeping residents informed of the situation, but engagement between residents, Town Hall, and our Provincial Representative should be ongoing and fruitful, despite them seeming to have very little to talk about at this time.

Before grist can enter the mill, the grindstones should be going at full speed.

Outside of residential engagement, it is important to have full and complete dialogue and collaboration ongoing between Town Hall and our Provincial Representatives.

Nobody will be served by either side sitting on their hands and looking to the other to make the first move and, in turn, respond.

This would facilitate a full analysis of Newmarket's efforts and exploring all possibilities on how we can succeed where they failed ? a Made in Aurora solution, even if ?solution? turns out to be a pipe dream.
If this includes further advocacy from Town Hall and, subsequently, our MPP, for an overhaul of the Ontario Municipal Board, so be it ? even if it might be a bitter pill for some of the players to swallow.

APPLAUSE ALL AROUND

On a brighter note, Aurora should give itself a collective pat on the back for the incredible turnout and participation in several events last week built around Remembrance Day. Although some might attribute the impressive crowds on Tuesday to a bright, sunny day, there was certainly more substance in the atmosphere.

Several Second World War veterans I had the pleasure of speaking to said they were impressed ? and indeed heartened ? by the number of young people who turned out at both services to remember the fallen. And it was an impressive sight.

Students filling in the north and south sides of the cenotaph provided a very noticeable presence ? and the particularly striking handmade poppies sported by several students from St. Joseph Catholic Elementary School were particularly eye-catching.

Afterwards, several people I spoke to (and overheard) mused on the merits of making Remembrance Day a national holiday, such as Veterans Day and Memorial Day in the United States.

?It is only fitting,? said one person leaving the park.

It's hard to argue with that. After all, February is home to the focus-group approved ?Family Day?. Certainly a holiday built around Remembrance Day would have infinitely more substance to it. But, for how long?

The more I considered the possibility (and, admittedly, it is a consideration which crops up year in and year out) the less I was sure. Canada Day, despite its name change in the 1980s, seems to be the only public holiday which seems to retain its original purpose, stirring the patriotic fervour in even the coldest of cold, cold hearts. Legally, Victoria Day, planned around the birthday of Queen Victoria, was mandated thereafter to be the Sovereign's official birthday, regardless of the birthday of the person sitting on the throne.

Hands up! How many of you raise any portion of your 2-4 in a birthday toast to Elizabeth? Anyone? There you go.

Or how about to John Graves Simcoe on the Civic Holiday Weekend which is, nominally, Simcoe Day? Yeah, I thought so.

Part of the poignancy of Remembrance Day is the effort that people go to, whether they are at work, school, or have the day off, to pause on the eleventh hour and remember in their own ways. As The Gap recently learned, to their public relations peril, Remembrance Day in Canada is not a holiday ? nor do we want it to be treated as a holiday like any other.