

## BROCK'S BANTER: Use it or lose it

**By Brock Weir**

Okay, you're probably not going to lose it, but bear with me for a moment.

I've never been a good prognosticator. Politically speaking, I may have a bit of a knack in predicting the outcomes of elections when things get down to the wire, but I would never be so bold as to join Auroran columnist Stephen Somerville in putting out Stanley Cup predictions.

First of all, sports simply aren't my forte and, let's face it, this is Canada. To throw out predictions on the only one of our national sports that still has the power to whip people up into a frenzy takes? well, it takes a solid pair of pucks.

Apparently, however, my nose has taken something of a hit.

While looking for an old article which ultimately turned out to be inconsequential, I came across a previous edition of Brock's Banter on the topic of the Aurora Youth Centre, or, as it is officially known, the Community Space for Youth.

At the time that column was written, there was a sense of relief around the Council table that a project that had taken so long to get off the launching pad was finally in midair, while others were tut-tutting the entire project as a predicted disaster, looking for the master switch to try and bring that baby in for a controlled landing before it got too far afield.

Nevertheless, it progressed and, as of Saturday, the results will be buffed and polished, ready to be enjoyed by the youngsters and teens it was created to serve.

This is Youth Week, and to mark the occasion, the Town of Aurora is throwing open the doors of the Youth Space on May 2 from 12 noon to 4 p.m. While many of the components of the Youth Space were open to the general public on February 28, there were still a few things that needed to be tweaked.

This weekend's events will include skate park demonstrations complete with live music and a DJ, drop-in sports, rock climbing, face painting, arts and crafts, and more.

It promises to be an exciting event for the people the space is intended to serve and, let's face it, after the controversies surrounding the Aurora Family Leisure Complex in recent weeks, it will be a welcome change of pace.

But, back to those early predictions of mine.

Back when the renovations of the Aurora Family Leisure Complex expanded from the simple addition of a Youth Centre to a nearly wholesale renovation of the entire building to accommodate it, I feared the worst.

What was the worst, you might ask? To be blunt and brief, it was the fear the Youth Centre would ultimately be temporary. With limited ways for youth to access the facility under their own steam ? after all, transit is comparatively limited gallivanting up and down Industrial Parkway on evenings and weekends ? I had the concern an initial bout of excitement over the facility might taper off.

Compounding this was the eagerness of the Aurora Seniors' Association to have use of additional components of facilities intended for youth when they were not using it. This is not a problem in and of itself, but putting myself back in the shoes of a tween, there is something decidedly uncool about going out of your way to gather with a group of friends in a room recently vacated by grandma after a gruelling yoga session.

Kudos to grandma for wanting to stay fit and active, but teens and tweens might not see it that way.

At the end of the day, the bottom line of my fear was this would ultimately evolve into an annex of the already bursting Aurora Seniors' Centre, once again leaving youth with nowhere to truly call their own.

I was heartened, however, to talk with youth having a blast in The Loft on the renovated Complex's second, and most recent ?grand re-opening?, at the end of February.

Those taking in the facility had no shortage of superlatives to describe the games, the entertainment area, and promised they would be coming back for more.

I hope many parents reading the paper this week, and over the last couple of weeks, decide to take some time out of their busy Saturday, make the trip over to the Complex and allow their kids to explore the place at their own pace.

The more they, and their parents, embrace it and take advantage of all it has to offer, the better chance it will be preserved, as intended for generations to come.

?The Youth Centre became a Youth Space,? said Councillor Wendy Gaertner at a Special Council Meeting held earlier this month, to allow members of the Aurora Family Leisure Complex to vent their collective spleen over their growing list of shortcomings sited in the grand redesign of the building. ?We don't have enough space for the users of various classes, so maybe The Loft needs to be a

shared space now. [The Complex] can't be pristine if we don't have room for the users.?

Now, Councillor Gaertner was always a proponent of a Youth Centre independent of the Complex for the entirety of the debate, so there just might be an element of ?tongue in cheek? in her words, but it raises a larger issue.

In the frenzy to collect, collate and address the laundry list of issues ? shortcomings, potential oversights, and what have you ? that have been identified as more and more people come into contact with the Complex, it is important to keep in mind the original intention behind Council's decision to overhaul the facility in the first place.

No matter how loud the hue and cry from residents and members who have their own youths firmly in the rear-view mirror (and well beyond the point where objects do appear closer than they actually are), the voices of the youth for which this centre, space or facility has been created shouldn't be lost in the shuffle.

Strong presence and strong engagement from kids and parents not just this Saturday, but for a long time down the road, will ensure this Community Space for Youth remains just that, and that corrective measures still needed to be carried out at the Complex serve all users.