

Business Improvement Area saddles up for downtown street party

By Brock Weir

After more than a decade's absence, Aurora's recently re-established Business Improvement Area has hit the ground running in their efforts to make the Town's historic core a destination once again ? and now, you will be able to see the first fruits of their labour next month with a party right on Yonge Street.

On Saturday, September 7, from 4 ? 11 p.m., Yonge Street will be closed from Wellington Street to Mosley Street, for what's billed as a ?family-friendly Hoedown pre-party.'?

Held one week before York Region's biggest annual party under the big top of the Magna Corral, this Yonge Street Party will have a western theme, feature live entertainment from previous winners of the Hoedown Showdown country talent competition, and special prizes and events hosted by downtown area businesses.

The September 7 event will be the first of what they plan to be quarterly seasonal street events to bring residents back into the Yonge and Wellington corridor to shop, eat, and have fun,? says Joanne Russo, Board Member of the Downtown Aurora BIA. ?We just received funding from the Town of Aurora in the amount of \$40,000 and our first big official event is taking place on September 7 where Yonge Street will be closed for pedestrian traffic from Wellington down to Mosley for our family-friendly pre-Hoedown street party.

?We have had great support from local businesses for this event and they all seem to be very excited about it! Restaurants will be extending their patios out to the street area. Yonge and Wellington businesses are welcome to have booths on the street advertising their businesses and other businesses in the Downtown Core itself are welcome to participate as well.

?The BIA has worked closely with the Hoedown organizers to create this family-friendly street event that complements the long-standing Magna Hoedown event, which is wonderful.?

Reflecting on the importance of Hoedown to this event, Sandra Ferri, Executive Director of the Aurora Chamber of Commerce, says, ?The Magna Hoedown is an iconic event that is an integral part of the community and the BIA is thrilled to be able to work closely with the Hoedown organizers to make the first BIA event a huge success.

?We're honoured to be part of this pre-event for the Hoedown. We know how much Magna has done for this community and we know how much Hoedown helps our local charities. This was the appropriate thing to do for our kick-off ? to really tie it in to something that is so important to Aurora.?

As such, previous winners of the Magna Hoedown

Showdown, the Ontario-wide talent search for Canada's next country star, will be on hand to share their music and success stories and Hoedown's 20 community partners ? charities and non-profits that will share in the proceeds from this year's event ? will also be present at the street party to sell event and raffle tickets while increasing the community's awareness of who they are and what they do.

As for businesses located within the Downtown BIA?

Well, to find out more about them and seek out some great deals, you'll have a chance to take part on a locally inspired scavenger hunt, which will take you through their doors for a chance to win a number of exciting prizes.

?We're excited to finally say, ?We're here and we're moving forward with supporting local businesses,'? says Ms. Russo. ?We're excited about the BIA and it is so nice to see and feel the support when we do our walks in the community and speak to local business owners. Businesses do want to see change and we're hoping they can see the change happening. They are happy to finally see this here; they've wanted it, but they didn't know if they could believe it. Now, the BIA is formed and having this first event is making them once again have faith that there will be some revitalization downtown.?

As a first-time event, the BIA Board members say attendance will not be the only measure of this street party's success; it will also be measured in the participation of local businesses. Judging from the feedback they have received so far, they say it is already proving to be a success.

?We have a beautiful downtown,? says Ms. Russo.

?There is a lot that is out there in our Downtown core, including great food. Come and just enjoy the moment and support local businesses, recognize what's around you and support them in any way you can.?

Adds Ms. Ferri: ?Come hungry, come prepared to savour some of the wonderful food we have on Yonge Street, and enjoy the entertainment and children's events.?

The Aurora BIA's Family-Friendly Hoedown Pre-Party will be held on Yonge Street from Wellington to Mosley Streets on Saturday, September 7, from 4 ? 11 p.m. It will feature live country music, fun kids games, stores and restaurants open to serve you, a locally inspired scavenger hunt with prizes and giveaways. For more information, visit DowntownAurora.ca. Suitable for all ages and families. Rain or shine.