

Celebrate Aurora showcased local artists, heroes



By Brock Weir

Despite Saturday's rains, Town Park was the scene of musical celebration.

Celebrate Aurora, the first venture between Aurora's Habachat, a local social media company, and REAL Corp., an entertainment education company headed by Farley Flex, brought together not only musicians from in and around Aurora and York Region, but also the people who have helped make Aurora what it is today.

"We believe in Celebrate Aurora that icons and heroes come from our local community," said Mr. Flex. "We're celebrating individuals in the community who have gone above and beyond the call of duty of what it means to be a citizen of Aurora."

The awards were emceed by broadcaster Christine Bentley, who hailed local community builders as some of the strongest assets of any Town.

"They are not asking for attention, but this is our chance to pay tribute to some people who make that difference, without whom this community wouldn't be what it is," said Ms. Bentley. "Sometimes we need to single out people who for some people might be invisible but should no longer remain invisible."

Honourees in the Heroes and Icons included Diane Buchanan, who was honoured for her more than 10 years' service as a volunteer for the Optimist Club of Aurora, Neighbourhood Network, and Belinda's Place, the Newmarket shelter for abused women, as well as her work founding the Aurora Diggers girls' softball league.

Brian North, Aurora's 2012 Citizen of the Year, was next, honoured for supporting fellow businesses and local charities through his Ellis Studios. He was also singled out for his work with the Aurora Chamber of Commerce, the York Small Business Enterprise Centre, as well as his work assisting students with Autism and coaching local sports teams.

Yellow Brick House volunteer Nora Priestly was heralded as one of the "keenest ambassadors" for the Aurora shelter for women and children. She was honoured for her integral work helping expand the organization not just within Aurora but into southern York Region and her hands-on work with the clients.

Moon Ing, the former owner of Moon Garden Chinese Food at Yonge and Wellington was not honoured for his cuisine in the 40-year-old kitchens, but his handiwork behind the grill at events hosted by the Rotary Club and Lions Club of Aurora.

Active in coordinating the Aurora Clothes Closet, a charity operating out of Trinity Anglican Church, providing clothes and services to needy community members, Deanie Minielly was honoured for her tireless work at the charity, as well as with Welcome Table, which provides meals and support for disadvantaged residents.

A key player in the Aurora Youth Soccer Club, Roy Cohen was saluted for his 20 years of service to sport, focusing on soccer, hockey and basketball, as well as his work with helping challenged children get everything they can out of sports.

Past president of the Aurora Chamber of Commerce Robin Taylor-Smith was honoured for her support for local businesses, the Aurora Home Show, the Aurora Optimists and the Run for Southlake.

A well-versed musician, Pat Mete has leant his talent not only in finding new and original talent, but entertaining for local charity fundraisers, and events for the Town of Aurora and local service clubs. Recently retired from her work as a teacher and guidance councillor at Aurora High School, Brena Taylor was cheered on by her mother as she took to the stage for her work in guiding students' success. She is a ?hero?, because she has dedicated her life to creating heroes and icons in her own students, said Ms. Bentley.

?I was very humbled by the phone call and still by this experience,? said Ms. Taylor. ?It is always nice to be recognized but that is definitely not the main reason why we put ourselves out there. It is to help others. [It has been rewarding to see] other peoples' success ? just watching students grow, inspire, and reach their goals, and even have a positive impact on someone, make someone smile, or being a part of their lives is what I enjoy.?

Before the weekend- long showcase of new and original bands was bookended by tributes to the Rolling Stones and Bon Jovi, the party kicked off with The Pick Brothers, a trio of siblings hailing from Aurora and Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School. Getting a kick of finally landing their first hometown gig after playing the scene in Toronto ? not to mention a gig in the very field in which they spent recess as students of Wells Street Public School ? their set offered a smorgasbord of musical styles.

?We have always played music and [brothers Gabriel and Jeremiah] were writing a lot of songs and we just got together to arrange them,? said Casey Pick. ?The whole band formed around having songs we wanted to get out and this is our third year as a band.

?We have never played in Aurora before. We have been on the Toronto scene the entire time. It has been really crazy and it is nice to play in the park.?