

## Chamber welcomes Interim Director following retirement of Ferri

The Aurora Chamber of Commerce has welcomed new leadership following the retirement of long-time Executive Director Sandra Ferri.

Back to the Chamber is Debra Wilson, who takes over the Executive Director position on an interim basis, ahead of permanent Executive Director, Alison Mumford, returning from maternity leave next year.

Wilson takes the helm of the Chamber at a very challenging time as communities local, provincial and national deal with Trump Tariffs and the ever-changing landscape his administration has brought into the Canadian economy.

"We live in interesting times!" says Wilson. "We will be watching and advocating for access to information, advocacy for all of our businesses, and access to government programs as they become available. In my role as Interim Executive Director, I plan on maintaining our many programs and events that have a proven success record, being accessible to our business, and being open to the possibilities that present themselves.

"The opportunity to help with the Chamber during its time of transition appealed to me because I have a deep history with the Aurora Chamber and understand who we support and why we are here. I started as a member, then joined the board, and then the Executive and helped the Chamber navigate some stormy waters during COVID. The position and the timing allows me to help with continuity and understanding for the Chamber and the community."

It's a far cry from when she first joined the Chamber nearly 20 years ago, "because we needed insurance coverage through the Chambers plan!"

"I then realised how much the Chamber had to offer and got more involved," she says. "The value of the Chamber in communities like Aurora is measured in terms of the success of our businesses, our coordinated efforts for many different initiatives, and our not-for-profits."

Before Mumford left on her maternity leave, she shared some insights on what the future has in store for the Chamber.

Mumford, who joined the Aurora Chamber of Commerce team two years ago after a time with the King Chamber, has focused on expanding community partnerships and facilitating opportunities for today's membership and the members of tomorrow "including young entrepreneurs."

"I was a small business owner myself, owning a café in King City I opened from scratch," says Mumford of joining a thriving community of entrepreneurs as the proprietor of Roost Café. "It gave me an understanding and knowledge of the challenges and rewards that come with owning a small business. Having that experience and seeing the support I got through the King Chamber through my business "guidance, connection and all of those kinds of things "is what led me to wanting this role with the [Aurora] Chamber.

Among the initiatives Mumford would like to continue building on, or lay the foundation of, are training programs for middle managers and enhancing financial supports that the Chamber is able to offer youth and emerging business leaders, particularly in the areas of manufacturing and the skilled trades.

"It is huge for some of those medium-sized businesses to be able to upskill their staff," says Mumford. "We're looking for funding so we can continue to provide programs and funding for businesses. We're excited to continue our partnership with the Town of Aurora and their Economic Development department, especially in this exciting time for Town Square—we can see what we can do to bring more businesses [into] and support businesses in the downtown core and really make it a destination. We also have a number of young Chamber members, some of whom are still in their teens, launching businesses and doing something around having a Young

Entrepreneurs group with mentorship and guidance [would be beneficial].?

Another possibility is to expand existing scholarship programs for high school students going into the skilled trades or the manufacturing sector for people in trade schools and at the college level.

?It's about building it up,? she says, noting she doesn't foresee the Aurora Chamber following the example of Newmarket and East Gwillimbury in merging their Chamber efforts. ?I think the Chamber plays a vital role in supporting businesses. I think Aurora has its own identity and we do have a lot of small business members and I fear a merger would get us a little bit lost. There would be other benefits of a merger, but I don't see it for us at this time. We have an awesome group of members, we're growing every day, and the ability to put on different programs for those people and provide that support [works] as a standalone Chamber for the time being.?

**By Brock Weir**