

Community leaders lacing up to help send Easter Seals kids to camp



There's no mirror ball trophy, but the rewards are even more meaningful for community leaders who are dusting off their dancing shoes and lacing up to help raise money to send children with disabilities to summer camp.

Dancing with the Easter Seals Stars returns to the Royal Venetian Mansion on Industrial Parkway South this Thursday, October 5, bringing prominent citizens of Aurora and Newmarket together for a common cause: the kids.

Over the summer months, Aurora's 2022 Citizen of the Year and restaurateur Sam Saberi, teacher Pegi Reininger, local business owner Raz Khamissa, former Flare Modelling owner Tracee Chambers, Lynnette Lanning of Neighbour magazine, event manager Cortney Cassidy, real estate broker Chris Cartwright, and Market Brewing's Bill Gianopoulos have been hard at work perfecting their fancy footwork for the big night.

And they have been doing so once again under the watchful eyes of Artistica Ballroom Dance Studios instructors and co-owners Anastasia Trutneva, Kelly Stacey, and Patrick Derry.

"It's all for the kids," says Saberi, owner of the popular Tina's Grill. "I'm way out of my comfort zone; I'm not a dancer, I'm a hockey and baseball player, but it is something fun to learn for a great cause. When I played Rep Hockey, they made us do ballet, so I've got quick feet but that's all I've got."

That's good enough because, at the end of the day, it's all about having fun and making a difference in the lives of youngsters.

Sending kids to summer camp is an expensive undertaking for any family, but it's even more so for families with children who require the use of mobility devices and other aids. Easter Seals helps kids be kids by levelling the playing field with camps that are fully accessible, allowing for not just fun with their peers, but invaluable opportunities to grow.

"Anything related to kids is hugely important to me," says Cassidy. "I have two boys of my own and hearing the stories of what Easter Seals does, of removing barriers for kids so they can just be kids and grow up the way they should, resonated and it really hit home when we went to the Easter Seals camp in July. I kept joking that I needed to keep my sunglasses on because I was just so welled up. It was so inspiring to see."

"We saw one young man literally being lifted onto a ropes course in a wheelchair. He's 20 feet above our heads doing all the things that in that very moment my two children were at their camp doing. That connection in my head and my two boys off doing archery at

their camp and here we were at the Easter Seals camp where they were doing the same with adaptive equipment that has been purchased because of Dancing with Stars, it was more than I could imagine.?

These sentiments echoed by Cartwright who, although he was unable to join some of the contestants at camp this summer, is no less familiar with the impact of the event. By the time of a rehearsal held at the Artistica studios on Friday morning, he had already sold more than 80 tickets for the galas.

?I want to show how much work has been put into the dancing,? he said with a chuckle, crediting Trutneva with giving him some new moves he didn't have prior to the friendly competition. ?But I also really want to let them see why we're doing it. Having the kids there and having them understand why they have bought a table or bought a seat, why they have donated ? having them see all the hard work that has been put into it is going to be amazing.?

Added Lanning: ?We're a community in a world that is not built for [people with physical disabilities] and the way they approach it with such courage and drive to do what they want to be done ? I had no idea how expensive it was and how it is not mostly funded by the government. This is for the whole family, not just the kids.?

Dancing with the Easter Seals Stars Aurora-Newmarket will take place at the Royal Venetian Mansion, Aurora, Thursday, October 5, with doors opening at 5.30 p.m. For more information on the cause, the Stars, how to support a contestant or to book your ticket, visit eastersealsdancing.org/tag/newmarket-celebrity.

By Brock WeirEditor, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter