

Cultural Centre brings on Director of Development as it charts five-year plan

The Aurora Cultural Centre is looking to strengthen ties with the local business community as they look towards the next five years and they're doing so with a new Director of Development with a strong record as a business leader.

Debra Wilson, who recently served as Interim President of the Aurora Chamber of Commerce, was recently brought onto the team in what they describe as a 'pivotal moment' for the Centre as it rolls out its new Strategic Plan.

'The Plan sets out a bold vision for growth during the next five years, with a focus on strengthening the Centre's role as a Cultural Leader and Artistic Hub in Aurora, expanding on its reach across York Region and deepening engagement with donors, partners, sponsors, visitors, artists, and audiences.'

The Plan sets forth what Cultural Centre Executive Director Suzanne Haines says are 'some new pieces to the puzzle that are really substantial for the organization.'

'The next plan really levels up the organization in a really significant way,' says Haines. 'I was looking for someone who could help us do that through community partnerships and relationships in the community, and who knew the community really well.'

'The next five years are really about the organization creating strong ties in the community, showing leadership and building programming that helps bring the community together,' Haines continues. 'Our residency at Aurora Town Square is a huge part of that opportunity, of course, and the right people in the organization. Our programming is in really great shape in terms of the performing arts, the gallery, and the arts education programs, really finding a seat at Aurora Town Square and being able to fill that space in a really meaningful way for the community. Now, what does the organization do next?'

'It's around two key phrases that are 'Cultural Leadership' and an 'Artistic Hub.' It's a key component to get very excited about over the next five years. The building of that requires a lot of community partnerships and that's one of the reasons to look for someone who has that strength for the organization.'

Wilson says she was first interested in joining the Aurora Cultural Centre team for the chance to work with Haines, with whom she says she has a 'great synergy.'

'Being able to enjoy who you're working with is really important, especially in this environment when you're doing outreach into the community,' says Wilson. 'The other thing that excited me was to continue with a lot of the work that I was already doing, which was talking to local businesses, local influencers, and sharing what's happening here.'

'If there's a love language for what I do, it's connections. It's bringing together and connecting people, whether it's programs or performing arts, or just connecting people; even when it doesn't impact me directly, I love being part of the solution for people and making sure that when the tide rises all boats float so it is helping everyone.'

On a road posted with landmarks reading 'Cultural Leadership' and 'Artistic Hub,' Haines says building connections is key in developing these areas.

'That kind of partnership and community involvement is going to help us build the kinds of programs that the community has been asking us for,' says Haines. 'We got to a certain point and we know that we want to continue to do that work with the community, so it requires those partners to make it possible. That's year one; year five, what those long-term goals are really about growing our capacity and resilience in arts and culture. In not-for-profit worlds, that's a super important part of it and thinking about what kinds of mechanisms we can use to help build sustainability.'

Adds Wilson: 'We're looking at expanding some of the programs that don't currently exist here yet. That's going to be very exciting

when we're able to announce that there's going to be something new happening here.?

The Strategic Plan, which was due to be formally presented to Council this week, states that establishing the Centre as that 'cultural leader and artistic hub' is a top priority that will be defined around 'research, benchmarking, and professional development' to learn from other examples how to build upon the Town's Economic and Tourism Strategies, establishing the Cultural Centre 'as a destination that must be experienced.'

This will work hand in hand with plans to enhance the Centre's 'mission to deliver accessible live performances, education programs, and gallery exhibits that build new and recurring audience participation.'

'This Strategic Plan is a living document that will guide our evolution while remaining responsive to community needs,' the Plan notes. 'Through careful implementation of these goals, we will strengthen our role as a cultural and artistic hub that enriches lives, supports artists, stimulates economic activity, and builds a more connected, culturally engaged Aurora and region.'

'Success will be measured through audience growth and diversity, financial sustainability, community partnerships, artistic excellence, and tangible impact on quality of life in our community.'

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