

Dancing with the Easter Seals Stars raises more than \$100,000 for kids



Community leaders from across Aurora and Newmarket learned some new grooves and busted a move as part of Dancing with the Easter Seals Stars 2022 this month and, in the process, raised more than \$100,000 for children in need.

Held at the Royal Venetian Mansion, and partnered with professionals from Aurora's Artistica Ballroom Dance Studios, rug-cutters this year were coach and advocate Viv Agreysi, Aurora Minor Hockey's Joe Bentolila, business owner and TV host Kasie Colbeck, realtor and business owner Wasim Jarrah, realtor Julien Laurion, restaurateur Jennifer McLachlan, Christine Seidman of Upper Canada Mall, and Aurora Historical Society president Patricia Wallace.

All received instruction from and took to the floor with Artistica co-owners Patrick Derry, Kelly Stacey, and Anastasia Trutneva.

This year's event took on a 1950s theme as dancers embraced the music and looks of the 1978 John Travolta-Olivia Newton-John musical, Grease, and began the event with a group dance that included several young Easter Seals ambassadors.

“We would like to thank Magna International for sponsoring our opening number, which this year had four of our Easter Seals children participate, which was phenomenal and started the night off absolutely perfectly,” says Easter Seals' Andrea Peterson. “I don't think you could have gotten any other feeling than seeing the kids up there doing the hand-jive; the looks that were on the faces, the grins that went from ear to ear – even talking about it now, I get goosebumps. I was so happy and I know that they did that for many other people in the room, if not everybody.”

The smiles on those faces were what the evening was all about.

Proceeds raised by the dancers and patrons in the lead-up to and during the event will go directly to helping to send Easter Seals kids to camp, and help fund necessary mobility aids to live their lives as accessibly as possible.

“When you think about the things they need like a wheelchair or walker? it's a set of legs for a child who can't walk, it's the dignity of being able to go to the washroom on your own and not have to have someone take you,” says Peterson. “Those are two really big things, especially when you see a child that is going through their teenage years, going through puberty, they all start to become independent, they want to have a bit of privacy, and they want to do things on their own. They will have the ability to do those things.”

This year's event has raised more money than any previous outing since its inception eight years ago, each time spearheaded by

Artistica co-owners Kelly Stacey, Patrick Derry, and Anastasia Trutneva.

Peterson says going over the top of their previous records this time around "just shows how much our community does support Easter Seals.

"It's always a sold-out event. I think obviously the successes of the funds raised of over \$100,000 is fantastic because that is going towards buying a lot of mobility and accessibility equipment that children need to help create an independent lifestyle, help them grow with independence, dignity and freedom and I think it is just really an all-around great time and it leaves everybody with the good feels. Everybody knows they've had fun and they have also helped make a difference.

"I think there was a great feeling of camaraderie with the dancers. I think people felt supported by each other and not just in it themselves. I think that we worked together as a really great team to pull this event off and it wasn't just one person who was able to make this all happen. I think it was the really kind of melding together of everybody and their talents and getting everyone to work together as a team.

"I'll lose a little bit of sleep [on what we can do to top ourselves in 2023] but the ideas are already starting to grow."

By Brock Weir
EditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter