

Dancing with the Stars raises more than \$80,000 (and counting) for Easter Seals kids



By Brock Weir

Local stars shone on the dance floor of the Royal Venetian Mansion on Thursday night as their fancy footwork and canny fundraising efforts helped raise more than \$80,000 for Easter Seals kids.

Put through rigorous training over the last few months by Artistica Ballroom Dance Studio instructors Anastasia Trutneva, Kelly Stacey, and Patrick Derry, participating dancers Kyle Peterson (outgoing Newmarket-Aurora MP), Joe Gorman of Humber River Hospital, realtor Matthew Miller, Artsy Baker Antonella Cellini, business owner Patricia Ristich, and Tracy Walter of the Newmarket Chamber of Commerce, showcased their moves in front of a packed house, taking time between their two individual numbers to highlight why they were there: dancing to help kids who can't.

Further underscoring this message was 2019 Easter Seals Ambassador Graham Baskin, a Grade 12 student from Uxbridge.

"My disability is actually undiagnosed and many of the doctors are puzzled by condition," he said. "So, what we know and what the doctors have concluded is that it is a neurological condition that affects the connection between my brain and legs. We first noticed this around Grade 1. I started to walk on my toes and soon after I couldn't come down the stairs with alternating feet. By Grade 4, I was using a walker and by Grade 7 I got a wheelchair to move around quicker and save my energy. I still have a walker, I still love to walk, but it is easier for me to use a wheelchair."

Easter Seals has helped Graham and

his family in myriad ways, including purchasing an in-house lift, giving Graham renewed independence at home, and providing formative experiences at summer camp, surrounded by peers who have similar life experiences.

Now that the lift is installed, my parents don't have to help me when I walk up or down the stairs and I can party at home," said Graham to the cheers from the audience. "[Easter Seals] camps are truly lifechanging. These camps are 100 per cent accessible and the kids that go can do anything they want, from activities like arts and crafts, archery, sledge hockey and the one in London even has a high ropes course 70 feet off the ground that kids in wheelchairs go on. I have to say the high ropes course is scary! You get up there and it is such a nice view, but you realize how high up it is. When these kids come home from camp, there are so many great stories, great experiences, and we meet new friends. On behalf of everyone at Easter Seals and for all the kids who can go to camp and get equipment, I want to say thank you, thank you for supporting us."

Following the friendly dance competition, winners were evaluated by a panel of comprising of former Dancing with the Easter Seals Stars contestants Mike Faherty, Melanie Bell, Brian North and Andrea Peterson, along with votes taken from the table, and total amount of individual funds raised during the process.

Rising to the top were finalists Joe Gorman, Patricia Ristich and Matthew Miller with the latter emerging as the winner of the 2019 competition.

Nobody left the floor empty-handed, however.

Gorman was recognized as the evening's top fundraiser, having contributed \$8,000 to the cause, while Kyle Peterson, despite taking a tumble in his first dance, being voted Best Entertainer. Antonella Cellini was recognized as Saggiest Dancer and Ms. Ristich as Most Passionate Dancer.