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THE AURORAN

Aurora's Community Newspaper

VOL 27 | NO. 7 | 905-727-3300 TheAuroran.com FREE WEEK OF NOVEMBER 27, 2025

Holiday Magic

Aurora Minor Hockey Association players had their eyes all aglow on Saturday as they took part in Aurora's annual Santa Under the Stars parade. The parade unfolded on Yonge Street and Santa Claus (INSET TOP) was, of course, the star of the show. For full coverage of the family-favourite tradition, see Pages 22 and 23.

Auroran photos by Glenn Rodger

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Aurora's 2026 tax increase expected to stay at 2.2 per cent following Mayoral vetoes

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Aurora's 2026 municipal budget will likely hold at a 2.2 per cent tax increase after Mayor Tom Mrakas formally vetoed budget amendments passed by Council on November 17.

Council met last Monday for a Special Council meeting for local lawmakers to propose amendments to the municipal budget which, following changes in municipalities granted Strong Mayor powers from the Provincial Government, is a financial blueprint now introduced by the Mayor.

A total of ten amendments were brought forward by Council.

While an amendment from Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese to provide additional funding to the Aurora Farmers' Market through the Tax Rate Stabilization Reserve, a fund that doesn't impact the tax levy, and a further motion from Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland to "pause" the addition of sail shade structures at

Continued on page 8

Aurora Food Pantry relocating to Mary Street in a move increasing accessibility

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

The New Year will bring significant changes to the Aurora Food Pantry as they move from their long-time home on Industrial Parkway South to new digs close to Wellington Street.

The Pantry will begin the process of moving to 16 Mary Street (Units 5 & 6) in early 2026 and will see the service shuttered between January 26 and

Continued on page 21

GET SCROOGED! – Holiday fun is also unfolding at Theatre Aurora as they launch their very first Christmas Pantomime, Totally Scrooged, this Friday, November 28. For more, see Page 11.

Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger

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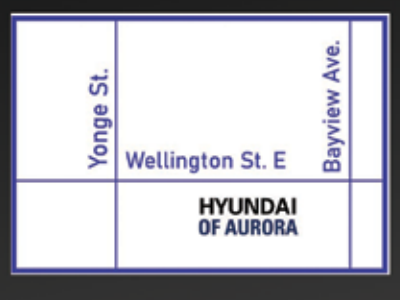

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SUPPORTING THEATRE– Aurora's Marquee Theatrical Productions opened their production of A Christmas Carol at Newmarket's NewRoads Performing Arts Centre on November 21. Ahead of the opening night, Marquee received a welcome boost from Lenard Lind and his Lind Realty Team. On Wednesday, the Aurora realtor presented Marquee and its founder, Sheryl Thomas, with a sponsorship of $10,000 – just the latest example of how Lind gives back to the community. **Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger**

Smaller recycling bins can now be requested from Circular Materials

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Residents looking to exchange the recently-arrived 95-gallon recycling bins for smaller 65-gallon models are now able to begin the process of doing so.

Last week, Mayor Tom Mrakas announced that a smaller blue bin cart option would soon be available through Circular Materials, the non-profit organization that will, following a Provincial shift in how recyclables are collected, be tasked with collecting municipal recycling biweekly beginning in 2026.

"Residents will be able to call in or visit an online portal to request an exchange of their current 95-gallon Blue Bin for a smaller one from Circular Materials," said Mayor Mrakas on Thursday. "I want to thank Premier Ford, Minister McCarthy, and GFL for working with us to ensure Circular Materials provides this much-needed option. And a sincere thank you to all my fellow N6 (Northern 6) Mayors – we have worked tirelessly together to push for a solution that respects the needs and feedback of our residents.

"Also, for those not repurposing their old Blue Bins, a plan for drop-off is being finalized and will be announced closer to January 1 when the Province transitions to producers being fully responsible for recycling."

Those looking to switch up their 95 gallon bins for the smaller model can request the change as of Wednesday afternoon, November 26, by visiting www.circularmaterials.ca/aurora or by calling GFL customer service at 1-833-779-4351.

Mayors of York Region's Northern 6 communities spent the previous two weeks in talks with Circular Materials and GFL, with the Province ultimately getting involved.

Todd McCarthy, Ontario's Environment Minister, issued a statement on November 15 stating Blue Box size options would be coming for concerned residents who said the 95-gallon models were both unwieldy and, in many cases, too big to be stored in their garages or elsewhere on their properties. They also said the size could pose issues for those with mobility challenges and even residents with sloping driveways.

While that was the word on November 15, the N6 Mayors, who represent York Region's Northern Six municipalities, issued a joint statement on November 18 stating their frustration in the process to get answers and resolutions.

"Over the past week, N6 Mayors have presented clear and consistent demands to Circular Materials for smaller Blue Bin options — a position that was validated and reinforced this weekend by both the Minister and the Premier of Ontario. Unfortunately, Circular Materials has not provided a firm and clear commitment on flexible bin size options for residents in N6 communities. This is particularly concerning given that other municipalities across the GTHA have successfully maintained their existing Blue Box sizes and collection schedules under the same Provincial producer-responsibility framework.

"To be clear: Circular Materials has dictated the terms of this program since its inception and has ignored input from municipal staff throughout the past year. N6 municipalities were never consulted on the size of the new bins or the changes to collection schedules before the rollout began earlier this fall. In the absence of proper communication from Circular Materials, N6 Mayors and Town staff have worked to keep residents informed, answer questions, and advocate for practical, resident-focused solutions. Circular Materials' Board of Directors is expected to meet later this week to discuss smaller bin options. If that meeting fails to produce an immediate and concrete commitment to implement smaller bins in N6 communities, N6 Mayors will formally request that the Province terminate its contract with Circular Materials and allow municipalities to resume control of their local Blue Bin programs — including maintaining current bin sizes and service levels.

"We will continue to keep residents informed of developments and will not stop advocating for fair, flexible, and responsive recycling options for all N6 communities."

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CANNABIS RETAIL REVIEW TASK FORCE

The Cannabis Retail Review Task Force is established to review and provide recommendations regarding the experience of the Town since permitting retail cannabis stores within the Town of Aurora.

Duties and Functions:

- Identify challenges related to public safety, land use, business clustering, signage, community perception, and economic development.
- Review best practices from other municipalities on cannabis retail management and community engagement.
- Recommend actions or advocacy strategies to address challenges and promote balanced community outcomes.

Application Deadline:
Friday, December 19 at 4:30 p.m.

For more details and to apply:
aurora.ca/Committees

AURORA

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TOWN OF AURORA
PUBLIC NOTICE

NOTICE OF ACCEPTANCE OF PUBLIC WORKS

Subdivision Owner: Mattamy Aurora Limited Ph.5, Registered Plan 65M-4542

Date of Acceptance: October 28, 2025

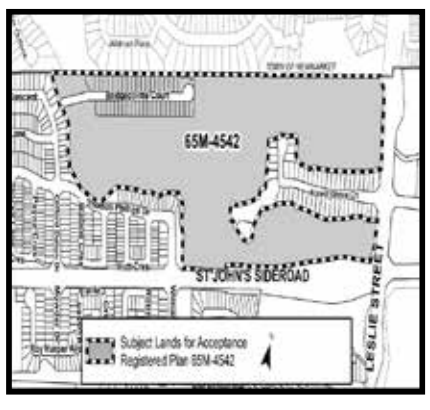
Applicable By-law Number: 6730-25

Description of Public Works Accepted: All services referred to in Section 3.01 of the Subdivision Agreement between Mattamy Aurora Limited Phase 5 and The Corporation of The Town of Aurora for Registered Plan 65M-4542.

Description of Streets in which Public Works accepted are located as per registered plan 65M-4542:

Bridgepointe Court

The public works as described above are herewith accepted by the Town of Aurora.



For more information, please contact 905-727-1375.

aurora.ca/publicnotices

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Sports Hall of Fame responds to proposed Budget amendment

I am writing to express deep concern over Amendment 7.3, introduced by Councillor Ron Weese, which proposes pausing the Hall of Fame's annual $30,000 Operating Grant until audited financial statements—costing nearly $10,000—are produced.

On the surface, this may appear administrative. In reality, it continues a long and unmistakable pattern of unequal treatment toward the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame — the smallest of the Town's five Official Community Partners.

For years, our request has remained at $30,000, while another Community Partners request additional funding, while ours remains the same, and are met with zero questions in return.

By contrast, our organization recently received nineteen questions — nearly all from the same Councillor. The same happened last year and the years prior.

We are a registered charity with revenues well below the threshold requiring audits. Last week in Council Chambers, the Town's own treasurer, Mr. Jason Gaertner, reconfirmed that charities under $250,000 in revenue have no requirement for audited financial statements.

This is further supported by statements made on public record at the January 23, 2024, Finance Advisory Committee, where the Councillor himself asked about audit requirements. At that meeting, the Town's Director of Finance, Ms. Rachel Wainwright–Van Kessel, clearly stated that audits are typically required for larger corporations with shareholders, not small non-profits. She warned that forcing a small organization to undergo an audit would represent a significant and unnecessary financial burden.

Our Treasurer, Brian Roberts—himself a licensed public accountant and trained auditor—confirmed that the audit threshold for non-profits is indeed around $250,000. The Hall of Fame's revenues fall far below that level. Simply put: This push for an audit is not aligned with Town policy, not aligned with practice, and not aligned with how other partners are treated. For anyone who believes this is an isolated issue, it is not.

Since the beginning of the last Council term, this targeted pattern has become increasingly clear. It is relevant history to note that the Councillor was once the President & Chair of the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame, and after stepping down—and after we secured charitable status—Sport Aurora attempted to reassert control over the Hall.

The Board of Governors rejected that effort, and since then, attempts to undermine the Hall have continued, including this most recent amendment.

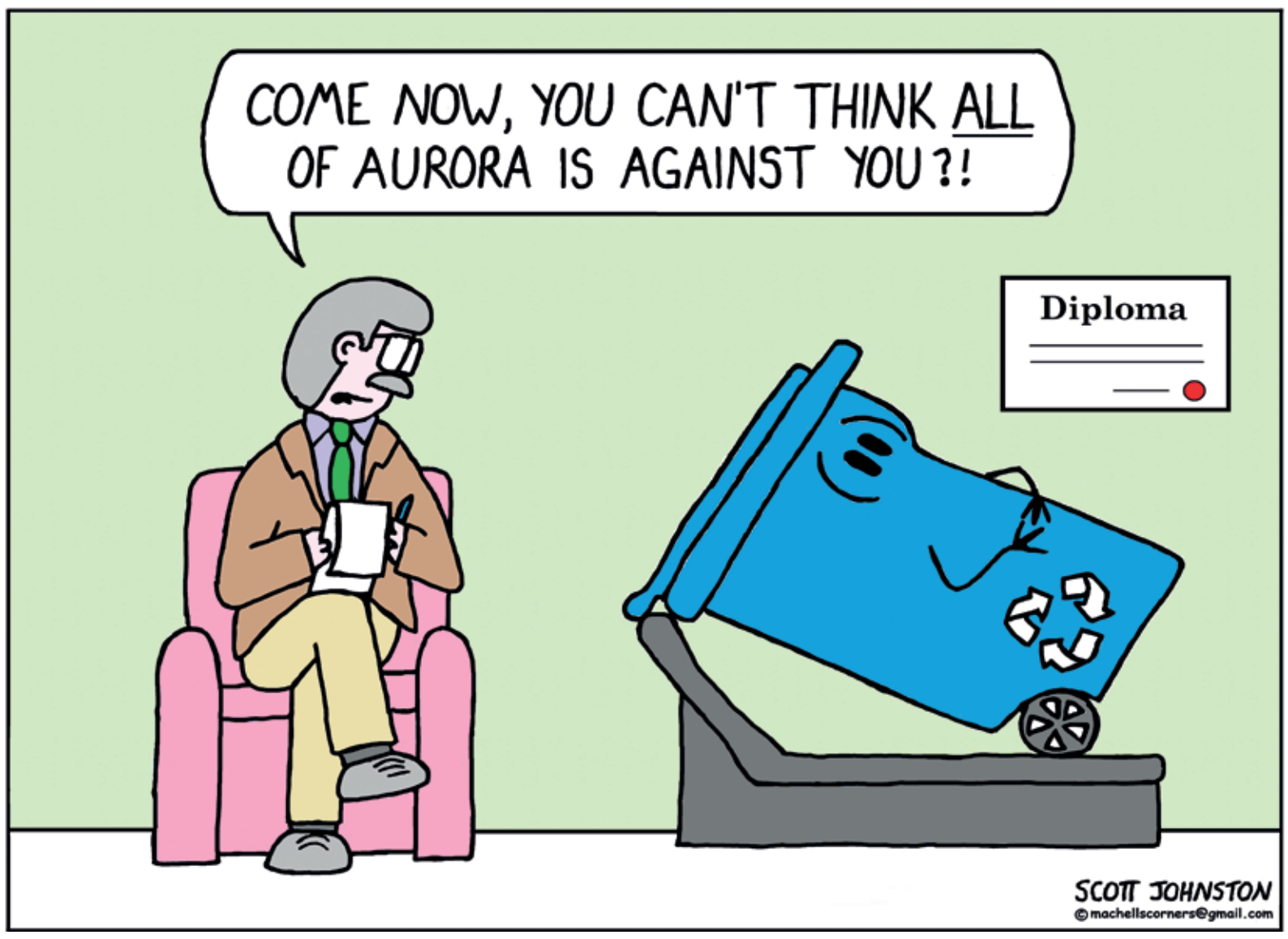
This stands in stark contrast to the many years in which the Councillor stood at the same Council podium requesting taxpayer support for Sport Aurora, where he still serves as President. Over the last decade, Sport Aurora has requested and received more than $335,000 in Town and grant funding, and I might add taxpayer dollars including multi-year commitments and Mayor's Charity Golf Classic allocations totalling $28,000 —none of which required audited financial statements or faced similar scrutiny.

Even earlier this year, behind-the-scenes discussions resulted in $50,000 being added to the Town's budget in support of Sport Aurora, again without audit requirements or questioning.

This is not fairness. This is not equal

Continued on page 5

Machell's Corners



Kingly Cash

BROCK'S BANTER

Brock Weir

It was nice to revisit the 1980s last week – even for just a little bit.

As a 1985 baby, I nevertheless have a few first-hand memories of that potent time in our pop culture hanging on for dear life. Even if the memories that don't explicitly involve members of my family are typically related to movies seen and TV shows enjoyed (who could have guessed that in this social media age we live in that remembering watching The Golden Girls in prime time would have a degree of cachet?) I hold the memories close as if they were endangered species.

Last Wednesday night offered a trip back in time when we went to see a great play in Toronto – Ava: The Secret Conversations – at the CAA Theatre. The show centres on classic movie icon Ava Gardner, expertly portrayed by Elizabeth McGovern, who recently completed her long run as Downton Abbey's Cora, Lady Grantham, as she hires a celebrity journalist to help write her memoirs.

It was the 80s after all, and the tales she could tell of being married to such luminaries as Frank Sinatra still had the power to set the literary world, along with Hollywood, on fire – but, given the clout of said ex-husbands in the business, there was no small degree of reluctance to tell her story.

The show was exceptionally acted, directed and produced – and found creative ways to evoke the spirit of the decade, and it stayed with me as our little group left the theatre.

The evening was still young and we ventured down Yonge Street to find a nice place for a warm drink and some dessert. Easier said than done – I couldn't believe the sheer number of eateries of all varieties that closed their doors at 9 p.m. on a Wednesday on one of Toronto's busiest thoroughfares.

We eventually settled on a retro diner – just to keep the vintage vibes going – for some coffee and a piece of pie – and they kept going until it was time to settle up. While two of us paid with cards, I just happened to have a $20 in my wallet and prepared to use it. The reaction of the server certainly told a tale. Out of instinct, he handed me the machine until he noticed the money in my hand and the mental gymnastics I could see him going through as he alternated hands between giving me the machine and taking the money, like two people who come face to face on a sidewalk and get caught in the perpetual loop of who's going to go around first, made me chuckle.

Evidently it had been a while since someone paid cash on his shift, but as much as it made me chuckle, it snapped me out of the 80s reverie I was still steeping in and back to reality.

Despite the prevalence of plastic in our everyday lives, we still often hear the phrase "Cash is King." You won't find an argument from me, nor, I suspect, will you find an argument from many small business owners who recognize some distinct advantages of filling their tills with a few slips of polymer rather than relying on a perpetual plastic tap dance, but if one person sees legal tender as a throwback, there are still more who are of the thought that if you have it, someone's out to grab it.

The phrase "cash grab" has been bandied about over the last couple of months as the Province of Ontario moved to make automated speed cameras a thing of the past.

The Premier has been insistent that the move, which was previously authorized by Queen's Park, was nothing more than a "cash grab" on the part of municipalities. This, despite the only cash being grabbed being those who were caught speeding on local and regional roads.

Whether or not these cameras were tantamount to a cash grab rather than being an effective deterrent against speeding is up for debate – and, in my personal opinion, the experts in this case have a distinct edge at the debate table – but I am glad to see the Province is not necessarily adverse to a cash grab for the greater good.

The Ontario Government last week announced new measures that will require impaired drivers to pay ongoing child support if they kill a child's parent or guardian.

"No child should have to bear the weight of losing a parent to impaired driving," said Doug Downey, Ontario's Attorney General, in a statement. "The devastating impact reaches far beyond the immediate loss – it can leave children struggling emotionally and financially. That's why our government is looking at practical solutions that can ease their burden in the wake of such tragedies and provide financial stability for children who are left behind."

The potential legislation, the Province added, was inspired by similar laws implemented in Texas in 2023 pertaining to drivers convicted of "intoxication manslaughter" and requiring them to pay child support until the child turns 18 or graduates high school.

This is a model the Province said they will be exploring – and the idea received an early, if tempered, show of support from Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD).

"MADD Canada works with those impacted by impaired driving every day, and we know the harsh reality families face because of someone else's harmful choices," said MADD Canada CEO Steve Sullivan. "We applaud the Ontario Government for looking into additional measures that would hold offenders accountable and support victims – particularly minors – impacted by the loss of a guardian that was killed by a drunk driver."

While I too applaud this move as an out-of-the-box approach not only to deter drunk driving but require those who make the conscious choice to get behind the wheel to pay for the ongoing impact of their decisions, this is not the only situation where a driver can make a conscious decision that very well might result in harm – and, worse, the loss off a life.

As the proposal works its way through the system, it will be interesting to hear the conversations along the way.

It will also be interesting to see if similar penalties for those who get behind the wheel and make a conscious decision to go well beyond the posted speed limit, resulting in the loss of a life, will be considered under this umbrella as well. Or, will the Province deem its decidedly within-the-box alternative to speed cameras – speed bumps and increased signage, measures that don't seem to be doing anyone a whole world of good – are sufficient.

Let's hope it's not the latter.

If cash is king, let's make it count across the board.

Until then, I'll stick with The Golden Girls. They may have only won an electric skillet and a lifetime supply of soup when they appeared on the fictional game show Grab That Dough, but it wasn't due to lack of trying – or grabbing.

THE AURORAN
Aurora's Community Newspaper

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To submit a letter to the editor, please send your email to brock@lpcmedia.ca. Deadline for submissions is Sunday at 1 p.m.

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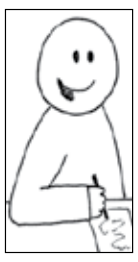
AURORA MUSEUM & ARCHIVES

AURORA MUSEUM & ARCHIVES is...

Bundled for Winter

As winter begins to wrap Aurora in its frosty embrace, it's time to get out those layers. This was certainly the idea for this warmly-bundled posse, as their horse-drawn sleigh waits patiently in the snow. This is the family of James Davis outside their stately brick home which has been visited by Jack Frost (2002.19.803a). They probably wouldn't mind the heated interior of a car, but their furs and a pocket of hot potatoes would have to do! But you don't need to be out in the cold to embrace winter: Next time you visit Town Square, take a moment to explore the winter scenes and artifacts on display throughout the building!



INSIDE AURORA

Scott Johnston

Bin There

Who would have thought that in a month when we got two unexpected dumpings of snow right after Halloween, the proposed and much debated 2026 budget was released and the holiday season kicked into full swing, that garbage would be the topic on all Aurorans' minds?

All it took was for hot tub-sized recycling bins to appear on everyone's driveways in early November.

As we all now know, this was in preparation for the waste company Circular Materials to take over blue bin collection starting January 1, 2026 in the Northern Six (N6) communities of York Region, which includes Aurora.

Based on pushback from the public, which in turn resulted in pushback from the N6 mayors, and then pushback from provincial leaders, apparently right up and including the Premier, we have received a tiny win in now being given the option of obtaining a slightly smaller bin that we can more easily fit in our garages.

But, in my mind, so many questions remain about this rollout…

It's great that folks now have the option of going to a slightly smaller 240 litre bin to replace the 360 litre one we were given. But for years, places like the City of Toronto have had the option of four bin sizes: small (75L), medium (120L), large (240L) and extra large (360L).

So why, after a Premier-backed intervention, no less, can we only choose from two?

While I understand that everything comes down to finances, why hasn't there been more pushback about the shift from weekly to biweekly pickup?

Also on the biweekly pickup, if Circular Materials won't allow residents to have a second bin, and won't pick up any recycling, like cardboard, that is not placed directly in the bin, how do folks deal with storing and disposing of recyclables for over a month if they miss a pickup?

As for finances, with the manufacturers now picking up the cost for recycling instead of the municipalities, how much are these savings to Aurora and/or York Region's budgets and will they impact/reduce taxes going forward?

Why does this change only affect the N6 while the "Southern 3" York Region municipalities (Richmond Hill, Markham, Vaughan) continue to get weekly smaller bin pickups, with no change in their foreseeable future?

I realize both parts of the region currently have different contractors, but why does this change impact only us? Or why us instead of them? Shouldn't this province-wide initiative affect everyone equally?

With the old blue bins, the contractor could see what's in them, and would occasionally - at least on my street - not pick up materials that were not permitted to go in recycling. How is that policed with a bin with a closed lid that is picked up and dumped by mechanical means? While the majority of people dispose of things properly, does this process allow for greater contamination of recyclables?

The Town recently posted a survey online (it's not up anymore) about garbage/waste disposal that when I read it this summer seemed to have an awful lot of questions devoted to transitioning to the same "big wheeled bins" for garbage pickup. If this does go ahead, will we at least be given more notice, and options for bin sizes, and perhaps a better communication plan?

On that note, are changes also being considered for organic/green bin pickup?

And finally, after what we've seen of our new contractor's less than stellar communications and stubborn pushback when questions were raised, how long will it take for us to warm up to Circular Materials?

I guess we'll have to wait and see.

Feel free to e-mail Scott at:
machellscorners@gmail.com

GETTING THINGS DONE

Mayor
Tom Mrakas

On Monday, November 17, Council passed four amendments to the 2026 People's Budget.

Over the past several days, I have taken the time to thoroughly consider each amendment, review the impacts on our financial plan, and speak directly with many staff & residents about these proposed changes.

After careful consideration, I believe these two amendments could have a significant negative impact on the municipality—an outcome I feel strongly should be avoided.

As your Mayor, my responsibility is to protect the long-term financial health of our Town, uphold fairness and transparency, and prevent decisions that put Aurora at risk.

In my view, these two amendments do exactly that.

Here's what residents need to know.

VETO – AMENDMENT – FUNDING FOR THE AURORA SPORTS HALL OF FAME

This amendment demands that the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame produce audited financial statements to receive their funding — even though Town policy does NOT require it.

Our policy clearly states that audits are only required for organizations with general revenue over $250,000. The Hall of Fame receives nowhere near that amount and has fully complied with every reporting requirement we ask of them.

If the goal is true transparency and financial accountability, then there is an existing process to achieve that:

Bring a Notice of Motion in the new year to review and update our policy;

- Have staff analyze it;
- Debate it openly;

Apply any new standard fairly and consistently to all organizations, big or small.

That is how responsible governance works.

What is not responsible is singling out one organization during a budget meeting to impose a requirement that does not exist in policy, is not required of organizations of similar size, and has never been applied in this manner before.

The Aurora Sports Hall of Fame is a volunteer-driven, nationally recognized institution that celebrates, preserves, and educates residents about our Town's sports heritage. They strengthen our identity as the Town of Champions — and they deserve fairness, not moving goalposts.

For these reasons, I will be issuing a veto of Amendment #3.

VETO – AMENDMENT – "0% TAX LEVY" BY DRAINING RESERVES

This amendment proposes to artificially freeze taxes at "zero" by gutting capital funding and raiding reserves.

Its trading tomorrow for today, and it's financially reckless.

This approach is basically asking the Town to take out a payday loan.

Borrow from our reserves today, pretend everything is fine; and then pay it back — with interest — next year, leaving residents with the risk of a massive tax increase in 2027

And everyone knows what a payday loan means:

It might look easy upfront, but it always costs you far more in the long run and in this case, a tax hike of 5% or more in 2027.

That is not fiscal responsibility. That is not transparency. And it is absolutely not the financial leadership our community expects.

Aurora has built a reputation — over many years — for strong financial stewardship. Under my leadership, this Town has never seen a tax increase anywhere near 5%… and it never will.

To better preserve and protect the integrity of our established capital plan, infrastructure and service delivery and the long-term financial stability of our municipality, I will be issuing a veto of Amendment #10.

Aurora's financial health has been built on years of responsible, steady, transparent budgeting — Not gimmicks. Not short-term thinking. And definitely not through decisions that mortgage our future for short-term talking points.

Aurora deserves responsible decision-making, honest budgeting, and leadership that protects residents both today and tomorrow.

As your Mayor, my priority is to make decisions that serve to protect Aurora from decisions that may create long-term financial instability, hidden tax spikes, or inconsistent policy application. And I will continue to use every tool available to me under the Municipal Act and the Strong Mayor framework to do exactly that.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

From page 4

treatment. It is a clear double standard. The Hall of Fame represents excellence, resilience, community pride, and respect. We honour 54 Hall of Famers, inspire youth, and preserve Aurora's rich sporting heritage. We operate responsibly—through sponsorship, community support, and volunteer commitment—not through excessive taxpayer demands.

We have maintained a strong partnership with the Town of Aurora. We recently renewed our Formal Funding Agreement, outlining KPIs and deliverables. The Town has already established Audit and Reserve Policies for Community Partners—policies the Hall of Fame follows.

One more concern deserves clarity for the public: Some residents have questioned whether Mayor Mrakas is in a conflict of interest because he sits on the Hall of Fame Board of Governors as a non-voting member. This exact concern led to a formal Integrity Commissioner review, and the ruling was unequivocal:

The Mayor was appointed to the Board by Council;

Under Section 4 of the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act, Council appointees are exempt from pecuniary conflict;

The Mayor acted fully within the law and his responsibilities.

This raises a natural question for residents: Should a Councillor affiliated with a sport organization—not appointed by Council—declare a conflict when voting on its funding?

Fairness, transparency, and proper conduct must apply equally to every member of Council. The Hall of Fame is not asking for special treatment. We are asking for equal treatment.

Javed S. Khan
President & Chair
Aurora Sports Hall of Fame

Councillor responds to ASHOF letter

I appreciate the opportunity given by the Editor to respond to the inaccurate and deflective comments made by Mr. Khan in The Auroran. I prefer not to engage in this manner, but Mr. Khan has made numerous inaccurate and misleading statements that warrant correction.

My responsibility as a Member of Council is to question budget requests as any reasonable and responsible person would. I have a fiduciary duty, and the residents expect it. Unfortunately, Mr. Khan feels "targeted", but I will note that the Motion was carried by a majority of Council.

The expressed "unmistakable pattern of 'unequal treatment'" of which he complains, is ironic since out of the five Community Partners, the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame is the only Partner that does not provide audited statements. Audit-reported costs are also inflated in his letter, as a similar-sized Community Partner does provide audited statements that are half of the expressed cost. Audited statements strengthen accountability and improve public trust. Something that the Sports Hall of Fame's Board and the Town should both value.

Most importantly, this approved Motion requested an audit before receiving taxpayer money. Not to deny it.

Let me address some inaccuracies. Mr. Khan reports that the ASHoF's request was $30,000when it was greater than that, and has increased each year. What was not stated was that the Town also provides $20,000 annually for additional curatorial services.

The "reasonableness" of asking for this audit was because the ASHoF:

- increased their operating expenses from $95,000 to $185,000 over the last three years, which is a 101.7 %. increase,
- has an accumulated operating reserve of $109,000,
- made a misstatement regarding a donation.
- showed conflicting expense lines and

Continued on page 20

Blue Door secures five York Region properties for housing as part of Land Trust initiative

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Blue Door Shelters has secured five properties in York Region as part of its Housing for All Land Trust.

The Housing for All Land Trust was launched in 2024 as a new approach to securing land for affordable housing.

The Trust idea was presented to Aurora Council by Blue Door last year, and Interim Executive Director Emmy Kelly says they have hit the ground running with the first five properties, located in Newmarket and Markham, and this is only the beginning.

Blue Door says the Housing for All Land Trust "takes a long-term, community-centred approach by acquiring and holding properties in perpetuity, ensuring they remain affordable and protected from market speculation."

The five properties that have come under the fold are a mix of scattered site acquisitions and long-term lease agreements.

"We're super-passionate about creating safe, dignified housing," says Kelly. "There has been a lot of progress and earlier this year Blue Door engaged in a very comprehensive community consultation with funders, service delivery partners, developers, housing and homelessness experts, and what we heard loud and clear was that continued need for housing for all – that it's needed, it's needed now.

"We are focused on building that movement further and continuing to acquire, build, and entertain affordable housing in York Region. Right now, we've been able to acquire some scattered sites. Blue Door is doing their first development and we're looking at potential land sites to continue to engage in more development of affordable housing."

At the end of the day, the Housing for All Land Trust is dedicated to preserving housing stock "from being financialized" and is driven by the three watchwords of "Advance, Protect, and Grow."

"That's really what we're hoping to do with the affordable housing portfolio in York Region," says Kelly. "'Advancing' speaks to the new developments that we can undertake. 'Protecting' is acquiring sites in the community that may otherwise be subject to speculation, financialization, and then 'growing' the portfolio of affordable non-market housing for the community. It's the right time for this land trust as well because Canada now has a focus on building non-market housing.

"Properties in the trust will belong to the community and will be safe from political or market changes. That's really our goal. What we aim to do with the properties in the Land Trust is that they will be kept dignified through the engagement of Blue Door's trades-based employment social enterprise Construct. We're doing a lot of sense-making to ensure that the work we're doing is sustainable and considers all the different elements. Construct will be supporting with property repairs and, at the same time, offer hands-on training opportunities for people facing homelessness and looking to enter meaningful, well-paying careers in the trades.

"Really what we're focused on doing now is we're primed and prepared to be the convener of York Region organizations, supporting sector collaboration, participation in preparation for a bundled approach to build Canada homes. Bundling is where different organizations will work together to achieve scale. We see successful examples of this model in different countries and even within Canada. Organizations that may even have different target demographics for service working together to achieve a larger development because we know Build Canada Homes is looking at developing at scale, so this will allow non-profits to be ready to act quickly. We know that it's going to take everyone though: Government, state partners, foundations, corporations, developers, local community members, everyone really coming together to get York Region out of the affordable housing crisis that we're currently in."

The crisis, she says, is "too big for any one organization" to support and, in their role as Regional Convenor, they hope to build a solid network to make a real difference.

"This is our moment, collectively, as York Region, to build the York Region we all want to live in and one where everyone has a safe, dignified, affordable place to call home. I think that is the art and intent of the message we want to get out and what we're trying to achieve right now."

Briefly

CANNABIS STORE ROBBED AT SWORDPOINT: YRP

Investigators with the York Regional Police Hold-Up Unit are seeking suspects and witnesses following a robbery at a cannabis store in the Town of Aurora.

"On Friday, November 21, at approximately 11 p.m., officers responded to a report of a commercial robbery in the area of Bayview Avenue and Hollidge Boulevard," say Police. "Four suspects entered a cannabis store, threatened an employee with a sword and stole a quantity of cannabis products."

Suspects are described as males wearing dark clothing.

"Investigators are appealing to anyone who may have seen something suspicious in the area, anyone who may have dashcam or video surveillance footage at the time of the incident, or anyone who may have information about the suspects, to please come forward."

Anyone with information is asked to contact the York Regional Police Hold-Up Unit at 1-866-876-5423, ext. 6630, or Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-TIPS.

Anonymous tips can also be sent online at www.1800222tips.com.

Girls Inc. formally re-opens its doors in Aurora

GRAND OPENING CELEBRATION – Girls Inc. of York Region marked the opening of their new base in Aurora on Friday morning. On hand for the celebration were, from left, were Girls Inc. Board Members Michael Hovey and Diana Colangelo, Executive Director Barb Wallace, Mayor Tom Mrakas, MPP Dawn Gallagher Murphy, and Program Coordinator Emily Lynch. **Auroran photo by Brock Weir**

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Girls Inc. of York Region formally celebrated their arrival in Aurora on Friday morning with a ribbon-cutting ceremony at their new digs on Wellington Street East.

Located just west of Industrial Parkway North, the move is the latest chapter in the evolution of a non-profit organization that has served young women and girls in the community for decades.

The move from their former location in Newmarket gives the non-profit a central hub for business operations, staff, and local programming.

"Girls Inc. of York Region inspires all girls to be strong, smart and bold," they say.

The organization provide education, mentorship, and community-based programs designed to empower girls and young women to reach their full potential.

Programs operate throughout York Region and, here in Aurora, some initiatives, such as their camp-style programs, operate out of area schools like Wellington Public School and Devins Drive Public School.

"Having a presence in Aurora allows us to be more accessible to families and community partners across York Region," said Barb Wallace, Executive Director of Girls Inc. of York Region, in a statement. "At the same time, we remain committed to Newmarket and the entire Region, ensuring that girls in every community have access to our programs and support."

Added Emily Agnoluzzi, Communications Manager for Girls Inc.: "Our new Aurora location enhances accessibility, conveniently positioned near the Aurora GO Station and a YRT bus route. It's central location in York Region allows our team to travel efficiently across the Region to deliver programs and services where they are needed most."

Friday's ribbon-cutting ceremony was attended by Newmarket-Aurora MPP Dawn Gallagher Murphy, Mayor Tom Mrakas, and members of the Girls Inc. of York Region Board.

Speaking to The Auroran after the ribbon was duly cut, Wallace said one of the many benefits of their new location was being able to use it in its entirety. They came from a shared space situation, and here they can have a bit more flexibility.

"We're fortunate enough to be able to have the entire space because it was shared space in Newmarket," Wallace explains. "We have been able to run programs in the evenings and it's great to have a separate entrance for girls to come in, and we've got book clubs running based on age – a younger and an older group, and we have a teen group that comes in every Monday night – and it's just really an opportunity to feel settled in the community."

In addition to the programs they run out of their new location, programs in local schools include after-school initiatives, arts and crafts programs, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math), and even a chance for participants to get their hands dirty – think slime-making.

"We also do some homework help, we do healthy snacks, we get the girls to help us make the snack, make smoothies, veggies and dip, and other really fun things where they can get their hands on and learn life skills in a fun way."

Girls Inc. of York Region was established in 1978 as a grassroots program.

More than 45 years later, programs now take place in every municipality in York Region and facilitate initiatives across more than 40 schools and community locations.

They help more than 3,600 girls participate in programs annually and are served by seven staff members and dozens of volunteers, "all working together to deliver programs that empower girls and support families across the community."

Girls Inc. of York Region is located at 154 Wellington Street East. For more information about what they do, visit girlsincyork.org.

BUSINESS & FINANCE

HOLIDAY GIVING – Oakridge's Fashions, the popular boutique located in Aurora's historic downtown core, celebrated the launch of their Giving Shop on November 19 with a tree-lighting ceremony in the heart of their store, located on Yonge Street, just south of Wellington. Proceeds from this year's Giving Shop, which boasts a wide array of Canadian-made gifts for everyone on your list, will benefit the Canadian Federation of University Women's scholarship programs, Rose of Sharon Services to Young Mothers, CHATS, Southlake Health, and the Alzheimer Society of York Region. Here, Oakridge's Fashions owner Deb Clark, right, is pictured here with Jennifer and Rachel of the Alzheimer Society holding felted mice tree ornaments, the characters of which feature in a new children's book penned by Clark.

Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger

Aurora's 2026 tax increase expected to stay at 2.2 per cent following Mayoral vetoes

From page 1

Aurora Town Square pending further analysis, were approved by Council – the lion's share were voted down.

Two significant exceptions, however, were a motion from Councillor Weese to pause funding for the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame until audited financial statements for 2025 were "received and approved by Council" and a motion from Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo directing staff to come back with a budget reflecting a 0% tax increase while maintaining current service levels were approved – and ultimately vetoed.

The motion related to the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame generated a great deal of discussion around the table. It was also the subject of a delegation from Aurora Sports Hall of Fame President Javed Khan who stated no other organization that receives their amount of funding from the municipality are required to provide such an audit.

"Over the past several days, I have taken the time to thoroughly consider each amendment, review the impacts on our financial plan, and speak directly with many staff and residents about these proposed changes," said Mayor Tom Mrakas, in his formal statement on the vetoes. "After careful consideration, I believe these two amendments could have a significant negative impact on the municipality—an outcome I feel strongly should be avoided.

"As your Mayor, my responsibility is to protect the long-term financial health of our Town, uphold fairness and transparency, and prevent decisions that put Aurora at risk. In my view, these two amendments do exactly that."

Municipal policies, he said, only require audits for organizations that generate general revenues over $250,000. The Aurora Sports Hall of Fame, he continued, receives "nowhere near that amount" and has complied with all financial asks from the Town.

"The Aurora Sports Hall of Fame is a volunteer-driven, nationally recognized institution that celebrates, preserves, and educates residents about our Town's sports heritage," said Mayor Mrakas. "They strengthen our identity as the Town of Champions – and they deserve fairness, not moving goalposts."

Moving forward with Councillor Gallo's motion to bring in a 0 per cent tax increase, he continued, would "gut" capital funding and "raid" reserves.

"It's trading for today and it's financially reckless. This approach is basically asking the Town to take out a payday loan – Borrow from reserves today; pretend everything is fine; and then pay it back – with interest – next year; leaving residents with the risk of a massive tax increase in 2027.

"Aurora has built a reputation — over many years — for strong financial stewardship. Under my leadership, this Town has never seen a tax increase anywhere near 5%… and it never will. To better preserve and protect the integrity of our established capital plan, infrastructure and service delivery and the long-term financial stability of our municipality, I will be issuing a veto of Amendment #10.

"Aurora's financial health has been built on years of responsible, steady, transparent budgeting — Not gimmicks. Not short-term thinking. And definitely not through decisions that mortgage our future for short-term talking points. Aurora deserves responsible decision-making, honest budgeting, and leadership that protects residents both today and tomorrow."

Additional amendments considered last week included:

- A motion from Ward 2 Councillor Harold Kim, which would have given inflationary increases to the municipal funds allocated to the Aurora Public Library, Aurora Cultural Centre, Aurora Historical Society, and Aurora Sports Hall of Fame. This did not receive a seconder and was not discussed;
- A motion from Councillor Weese to increase funding to Aurora's nine registered Ratepayers Associations to pay for meeting expenses up to $500 per Association. This was defeated;
- A motion from Councillor Gilliland to pause funding for a new LED Screen for use at special events. This motion was defeated on a vote of 4 – 2, with only Councillors Gilliland and Wendy Gaertner voting in favour of it. Councillor Thompson was not present for the meeting;
- A motion from Councillor Gilliland to add a new capital project in the budget – an off-leash dog park in west Aurora. This was defeated 5 – 1.
- A motion from Councillor Gilliland to remove a new student position with a salary of $47,000, funded by the Tax Rate Stabilization Reserve, which was defeated on a tie vote;

"My amendments came from a place of wanting to enhance what's already been proposed, in a spirit of collaboration and shared commitment to our Town's future," said Councillor Gilliland in a social media post following last week's meeting. "This isn't about criticizing anyone's work, but about fine-tuning our priorities so that we can best serve our community together. Each of these amendments were really about ensuring that our spending aligns with our shared goals of community well-being, local economic vitality, and principles. Process and information were not always clear, coupled with mixed messaging.

"We all want the same thing: a budget that reflects the 'needs' of our residents, supports our local businesses, and promotes a vibrant, balanced community. And no budget is perfect by any means. I believe leadership is about lifting others around you to succeed together. Rather than leading for oneself. Tonight, I did not feel that collaboration. I am not interested in political theatre and value my time and everyone else's. I truly hope these last few months of this term, Council can put differences aside and focus on the stability the community really needs."

Town set to take over management of the Aurora Farmers' Market

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

The Town of Aurora will take over the day-to-day management of the Aurora Farmers' Market next year in a new funding model approved by Council.

Local lawmakers last week approved a $23,922 increase in the Aurora Farmers' Market's allocated funding as part of the 2026 Budget. This funding, along with a contribution of $13,500 from the Market itself, will be used to fund the positions of a Market Coordinator, a Seasonal Supervisor Support Assistant and Operations Coordinator under the Town umbrella.

The management shift was pitched to Council earlier this month at the start of budget deliberations by Market Manager Cathy Williams who said while the growth of the Market in recent years has been "incredible," it's brought about "increasing administrative, operational, and communication demands."

"Our Market Coordinator is retiring after this season and the workload – vendor management, logistics, social media, volunteer coordination, and regulatory compliance – has grown beyond what a volunteer board can sustain. Simply put, we've reached our limits of what a volunteer-run structure can manage," said Williams.

"Our Board proudly served this community for over a decade, but we are now operating with just five active members down from nine. Recruitment has proven difficult as administrative and logistical workload has become too demanding for volunteers alone, therefore likely discouraging others from volunteering on the Board. We are also seeing an increased need for expertise in risk management and health and safety compliance – areas that require professional oversight. While our commitment has never wavered, the reality is that the structure that once worked no longer fits the needs of today's market."

The present situation is "urgent," she added, and without staffing supports in the season ahead, the Market "cannot continue beyond the 2025 season in its current form."

"Without this partnership, the Market would have to scale back – fewer vendors, fewer community activities, and diminished programming," said Williams. "We have worked with Town Staff regarding this proposal and we are respectively requesting that the Town transition to the Market Staffing structure to come under Town Management. This would include Town employees managing day-to-day operations, vendor applications, compliance, insurance, communications, and social media."

A Market Coordinator would be needed for about 12 hours a week, an Operations Coordinator eight, and a Social Media coordinator for two, she added.

"We're asking the Town to consider supporting a shift in our structure from a working board to a governance board. This would allow us to focus on oversight, approving vendors, ensuring compliance with Farmers Market Ontario standards, and guiding programming," said Williams, noting similar models have been adopted in other York Region municipalities. "This partnership would ensure the long-term sustainability of the Farmers Market and safeguard its role as a cultural and economic asset for the Town. It would support local small businesses and farmers, sustain weekly cultural programming and entertainment, strengthen community connections, and align directly with the Town's strategic priorities of community vitality, economic development, and food security.

"Without this support, the future of the Aurora farmers market beyond 2025 is uncertain. A closure or even a scaled back version would represent a significant loss to our community, economically, socially, and culturally."

Support was found across the Council table which approved a Budget Amendment brought forward by Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese to establish the requested model.

"I do believe this is the right step forward," said Robin McDougall, Aurora's Director of Operations, last week. "It's a good opportunity to evaluate 2026 in the governance model that we're looking to move ahead with. They still retain responsibility and oversight of the Farmers' Market; we are just there to support from a staffing structure. They have worked hand-in-hand with Shelley Ware, our Special Events Supervisor, on developing this structure and we're confident that it would be a useful exercise to go through next year and we'll learn from it as well."

While Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner said she was in favour of the move, she did not approve of the funding coming from the Town's Tax Rate Stabilization Reserves. Mayor Tom Mrakas, however, argued it was an appropriate funding source.

"We've done it with the Windrows, we've done it with many pilot projects," he said. "This is exactly what the Reserve is supposed to be used for – a defined pilot. It's a small amount and in 2027, if the pilot works, we can…make those adjustments moving forward into operations."

Councillors too were looking to the future.

"I'm in support of this and the increased oversight and giving the Market what it needs to also expand," said Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo, adding, in future years, he would like to see funding come from the Community Services Department.

Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland added that, in her view, the shift was an example of how the Town can support its own local economy – and residents at large.

"This is what we love – keeping things centralized and local and being able to connect with our local community, walk in the park with your kids, and if we are going to be investing in any of our community partners, to me, this seems to be the place," she said. "It's been really the heart of what makes us still such a small town."

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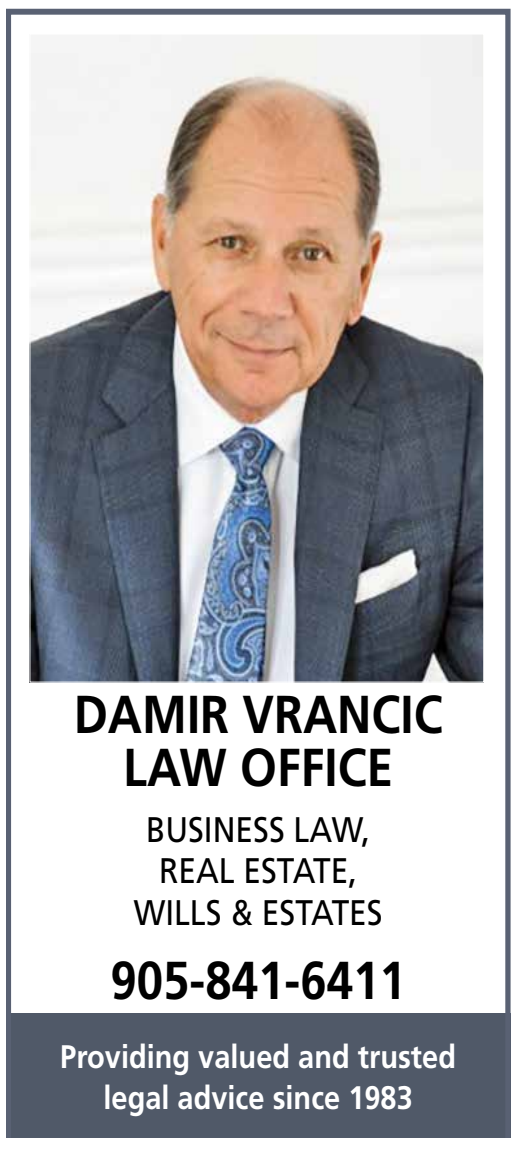


Cultural Centre faces "losing momentum" without Budget increase

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Going forward without a boost in municipal support could see the Aurora Cultural Centre "lose momentum" in the face of significant growth.

That was the message delivered to Council by Suzanne Haines, Executive Director of the Aurora Cultural Centre, this month as local lawmakers began Budget deliberations.

The Cultural Centre sought a $11,200 increase to their municipal funding in 2026, a figure that was previously budgeted as part of the Town's Multi-Year Budget process. Inflationary boosts, however, were not part of the equation after Mayor Tom Mrakas presented a 2026 Municipal Budget with a proposed 2.2 per cent tax increase rather than the previously anticipated 2.9 per cent.

"Demand from our community for our programs continues to grow," Haines told Council. "Program statistics are expected to exceed previous years when recorded to year end."

The Cultural Centre, she said, has been able to leverage the support they receive from the Town to generate revenue from elsewhere, but she added the last year has proved difficult.

"We had a difficult year-end in 2024 with a second significant year of operational deficit based on external factors and timing challenges," she said. "The Board manages the fiscal plans closely and required a revised Budget Plan in early 2025 given these realities, including a focused effort on a five-year Working Capital Deficit Reduction Plan.

"Town Staff were made aware of the issues caused by our deficits and worked with us throughout the year to improve collaboration and operational efficiencies, including outcomes that helped us maintain a positive cash flow. This is clearly our financial responsibility to respond to, and we've not asked for additional funding for the issue. The plan is strong and managed by the Board and staff to ensure we resolve these challenges. An excess of revenue over expenses must be budgeted to support sustainability for the organization as we continue to deliver programs to the community."

Haines said the Centre is aware of the "financial pressures that have been part of the budget conversation" but said their $11,200 ask is "critical to the organization's capacity to meet the community interests."

"We provide a place of well-being for the community, a place to be innovative and creative, a place of dialogue, a proven outlet for social inclusion and diverse voices, a place of belonging, civic pride, and connection to each other," she said. "We are at the end of a four-year planning cycle where we worked with the Town to open the incredible Aurora Town Square, a place widely registered as unique in York Region and Ontario, especially the way we work together to capitalize on the skill sets of the partners to the benefit of the community. Halting momentum now for a full year will halt our ability to continue building for the community, including our plans that stimulate a creative, inclusive, and socially responsive community, helps to build a reputation for Aurora as a whole and the Cultural Centre, and leverages new revenue sources."

A 2023 economic report, she added, "documented $16.3 million of economic impact leveraged from their $1.5 million budget in the previous year – we know that every dollar invested matters and every program we offer has significant economic impact on Aurora businesses and the community."

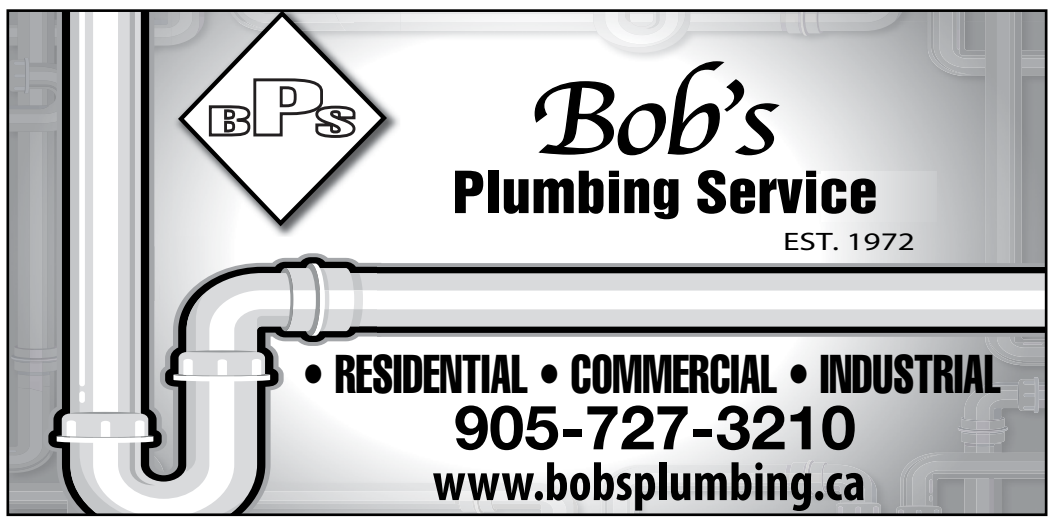
When it came turn for Council to ask questions, Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo, who has served on the Aurora Cultural Centre's Board, agreed that the challenges faced by the Centre when they had to move out of the Church Street School for the duration of Aurora Town Square construction, raised much uncertainty.

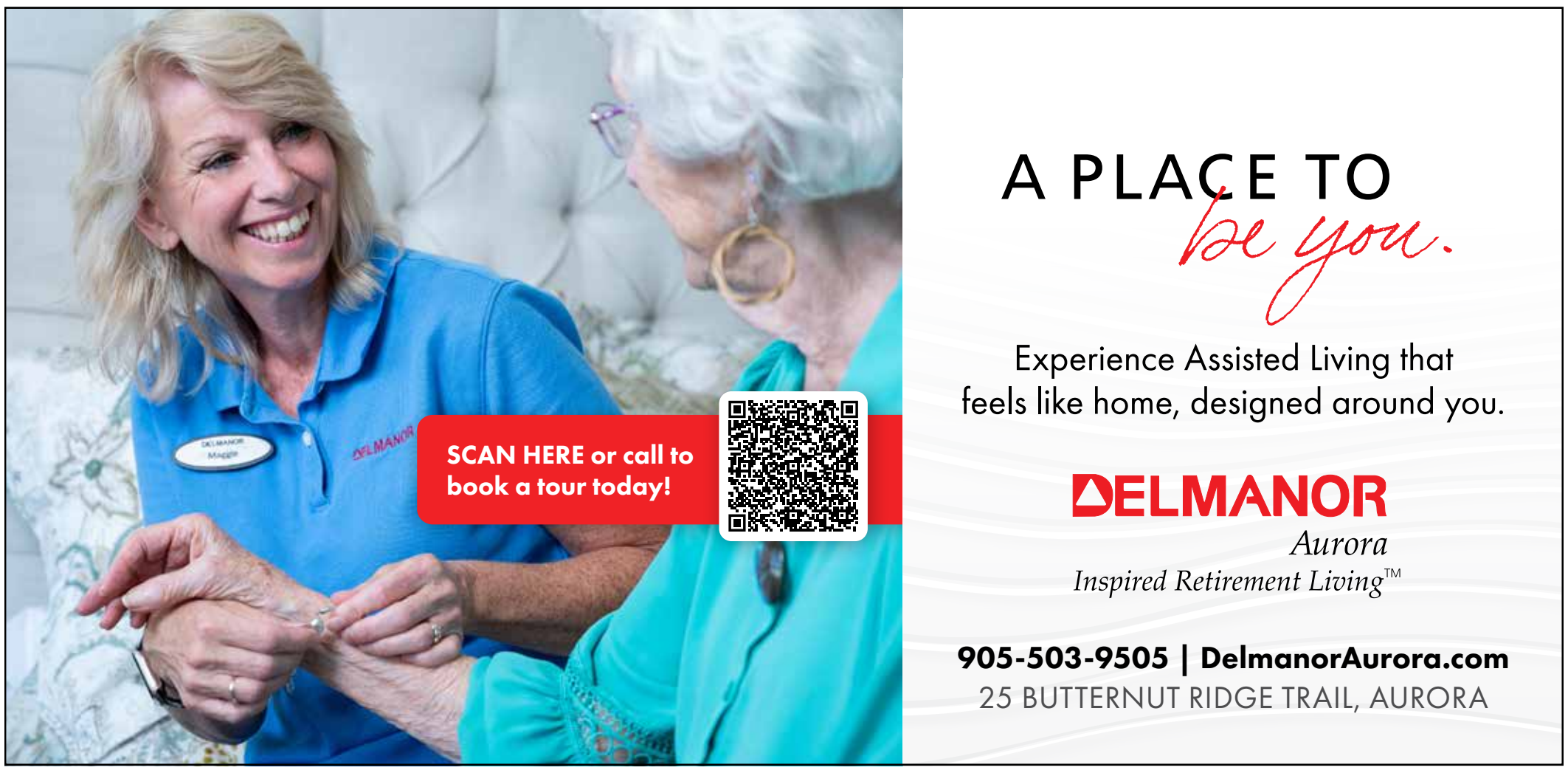
But it was a journey of excitement, too, Haines added: "While we're experiencing a working capital deficit right now, it's made of the excitement and the planning for all the programs that we wanted to bring to the Centre and the partnerships that we were building and building and building. So that investment, while challenging now, is worth it, and we're going to work to eliminate that."

Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese said he was "proud" of what the Aurora Cultural Centre brings to the local community and said the model they've developed "is working."

"I have just seen your organization go from all this adversity and the resilience your organization went through in order to keep afloat was amazing," said Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland. "We asked a lot of the Aurora Cultural Centre for the patience you went through – not only the Town Square project, but through COVID and tightening your straps in the Budgeting."

Mayor Mrakas, in his comments, said the municipal investment of $600,000 will continue and the Town "continues to invest in our community partners" to make sure they "continue to thrive within the community."





Totally Scrooged opens on the Theatre Aurora stage this Friday. **Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger**

Theatre Aurora presents Totally Scrooged: A Review

BY SCOTT JOHNSTON

People were openly booing at Theatre Aurora's latest play, but that was a good thing as it was the delightful Christmas pantomime "Totally Scrooged."

A pantomime is an interactive performance, where at times the players converse directly with the audience members, who in turn are encouraged to cheer for the heroes and boo at the villains.

As this is a take on the holiday classic "A Christmas Carol", the boos are directed at main character Ebenezer Scrooge.

Caroline Smith's slightly twisted and very amusing version of the classic tale is full of both modern and local references, and provides humour that can be enjoyed by both children and adults.

The show has many musical numbers consisting of familiar and catchy songs, some of which have revised lyrics to suit the story.

There is also a lot of enthusiastic choreography, including during the very impressive "If I Should Ever Lose My Job".

The story itself broadly follows Dickens' book and characters, with a Fairy guiding us along the way.

Set in Victorian England (or at times, maybe not) miserly Scrooge encounters the wonderfully portrayed ghosts of Jacob Marley, as well as those of the Past, Present and Future. Does he learn his lesson in the end, or being a pantomime, is there a twist? You'll have to go to find out.

Although the entire cast of 19 is wonderful, several stand out.

Carolynn Kent makes her version of Scrooge suitably boo-worthy.

Kent Hunter plays the long-suffering employee Bob Crachit, with David Haddad terrifically over-the-top as his hat-obsessed wife Euphoria.

David Pang has the most audience interaction as enthusiastic nephew Fred, Katie Tanton has fun as the Present Spirit and Abi Oliphant guides us along the story as the Fairy.

The rest of the cast are excellent actors and singers, especially as many play multiple roles.

Also impressive is musician Adine Mintz, who was onstage and performs not only on the keyboard, but sings and dances as well, through much of the production.

The impressive lighting, costumes and sets also helped to provide the right atmosphere.

With zany characters, detailed choreograph, zippy songs and a terrific cast bringing a fun script full of one-liners to life, "Totally Scrooged" makes for a delightful way to start off the holiday season.

Evening performances of "Totally Scrooged" continue at Theatre Aurora, 150 Henderson Drive, November 28 & 29, and December 4 & 5, with matinees on November 29 & 30, and December 6 & 7.

Tickets are available through the box office at 905-727-3669.

Turn back the Christmas Clock with holiday activities at Hillary House

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Turn back the Christmas clock to holidays of yore as the Aurora Historical Society hosts Victorian-themed activities at Hillary House National Historic Site this season.

Visitors who stopped by the Hillary House verandah on Saturday night for a warming cup of hot chocolate as they waited for the Santa Under the Stars parade to get underway got a sneak preview of some of the evergreen Christmas ornaments created by Garden Aurora (The Aurora Garden & Horticultural Society) that gave Aurora's only National Historic Site a yuletide feel – and this Saturday, November 29, you can get in on the action.

On Saturday, the two groups are coming together for a pair of Holiday Wreath Workshops.

With tickets set at $50, which includes all materials, crafty residents can make the most out of boughs from either 10 a.m. to 12 noon or 2 – 4 p.m.

"Garden Aurora is very generous with their time and they do all the natural decorations on the exterior of Hillary House for the holidays and, through the process, I thought about a wreath-making workshop as it ties into the Victorian decorating style – using all-natural products like cedar, pine, pinecones and berries and they jumped right on board with helping," says Aurora Historical Society Executive Director Kathleen Vahey. "We really appreciate this partnership and it is completely guided by Garden Aurora. They also supply most of the natural materials as well and all of the proceeds go back to Hillary House.

"It's really a blast and every year I want to try it, but we always sell out!"

The Victorian theme continues on Saturday, December 6, with the Society's inaugural Victorian Christmas Afternoon Tea, which will have two seatings at 12 noon and 2.30 p.m. Featuring an array of teas, sandwiches, scones, seasonal desserts, warm apple cider and more, the tea is $35 per person and sponsored by Hurst Bakery.

"This is the first time we've done a Christmas-themed afternoon tea, building on the afternoon teas we host at Hillary House," says Vahey. "Victorian Christmas is such fun with all these old decorations and we're changing the menu up to do some seasonal desserts. This is sponsored by Hurst Bakery and we also partner with other local caterers for the sandwiches.

"We want to see people celebrating the holidays. Maybe they are looking for something new to do [and] they just want a quiet, intimate activity to do with their family or their friends for an afternoon – come and enjoy a themed Christmas Afternoon Tea in a decorated Victorian and Edwardian house. It's the perfect setting to host and, once all the decorations are up, it will be even better!"

For more information on these and other upcoming Aurora Historical Society and Hillary House events, including tickets, visit aurorahs.com or call Hillary House at 905-727-8991.

Lyla and Allyse served up some hot chocolate to Brant at Hillary House on Saturday night as the Santa Under the Stars parade got underway. **Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger**

(LEFT) Former Aurora resident Joan Hill Tovey relived her experiences as a Farmerette at a special screening at Aurora Town Square this month. (RIGHT) Bonnie Sitter and Colin Field, who produced and directed We Lend a Hand: The Forgotten Story of Ontario's Farmerettes, are pictured in the Aurora Town Square Performance Hall with Joan. **Auroran photos by Glenn Rodger**

Aurora "Farmerette" has blast from the past at film screening

We Lend a Hand: The Forgotten Story of Ontario's Farmerettes hosted by Film Circuit, Town, Historian

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Joan Hill Tovey moved to Aurora in 1936 when she was just seven years old.

At the time, it was a town of just 3,000 people, and she lived in the same house at 88 Wellington Street, until she married at 21.

Those are the broad strokes – in between, she was one of tens of thousands of Ontario girls who had quite an adventure as Canada was getting back on its collective feet following the privations of the Second World War. Now 96, she returned to Aurora this month from Peterborough to see that story unfold at Aurora Town Square.

On November 12, the Aurora Film Circuit came together with the Town of Aurora and historian Christopher Watts to host a screening of We Lend a Hand: The Forgotten Story of Ontario's Farmerettes.

The documentary charts the story of no less than 40,000 teenage girls who volunteered on Canadian farms to aid the war effort – both during the war itself and the national recovery.

The Farmerettes were part of the Ontario Farm Service Force that operated between 1941 and 1952, across the Province and into parts of Quebec.

"With no prior farming experience, their hardships were tremendous," say filmmakers. "For long months they worked under relentless weather conditions and schedules. Yet they single-handedly managed to produce hundreds of thousands of tons of food that were shipped off to the frontlines to feed starving European populations and even prisoners of war."

The event was also attended by director Colin Field and producer Bonnie Sitter who shared why the story of Ontario's Farmerettes struck such a chord with them.

"I grew up with a father who loved to farm," said Sitter. "We always had an orchard and a huge garden and I remember fondly being [with him] and learning how to do grafting and budding on trees for other orchard growers and we always had a job: go get the peas and get them shelled, pick the beans, dig the potatoes, pull the little potato bugs… I'm hoping that, for people that didn't have the opportunities that I had as a child, it will impact them and they'll look at the effort it takes to produce food.

"First you have to have the land, you prepare it, you buy the seeds, you sow the seeds, and so many steps, and then you hope that the weather cooperates and you actually get a crop. Nothing happens in our world that people are not fed. Getting food is number one, and I think our society, to a large extent, is forgotten because you pick up the phone and you ask somebody to bring the food to you these days."

One such person who didn't have the opportunities Sitter had as a child was Field himself.

"I grew up in Willowdale, so it was quite educational for me hearing 80 years later how strong the memories were for these [women]," he said.

"Now I've got old bones and muscles and everything. I can't imagine picking one asparagus, let alone eight hours a day for the whole season. As we were down in the Niagara Region filming, it was some pretty hot days and we could barely be there in the fields, let alone on the second floor of a barn where they were sleeping before air conditioning had been invented. Just the reality of what that was like and what it's still like in many places in the world. The appreciation for how much goes into…and that's just to plant and harvest, let alone everything that happens after that."

Director and producer weren't alone in wanting the documentary to serve as an inspiration for the up-and-coming generation to learn more about agriculture and where our food comes from, with several members of the audience suggesting the documentary should be standard viewing for students, particularly in November as so many minds are turned to Remembrance and war experiences both abroad and on the home front.

"I think that program (the Farmerettes) would be so worthwhile if every high school student had to spend a year on the farm," said Sitter. "I think a lot of learning would happen and a lot of attitudes would change."

For more on We Lend a Hand: The Forgotten Story of Ontario's Farmerettes, visit welendahand.ca.

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Girls Inc. aims to help 25 families this holiday season through Hamper Campaign

Girls Inc. Board Members Michael Hovey and Diana Colangelo joined MPP Dawn Gallagher Murphy, Mayor Tom Mrakas, and Girls Inc. Executive Director Barb Wallace for the launch of their Holiday Hamper campaign last week. **Auroran photo by Brock Weir**

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Girls Inc. of York Region is looking for your help to make the holidays that much brighter for 25 area families in need.

The Aurora-based non-profit, which provides mentorship opportunities for youth in the community, kicked off its Holiday Hamper campaign on Friday when they formally opened their new offices at 154 Wellington Street East.

"The campaign provides low-income families, whose children regularly participate in Girls Inc. programs and services, with a holiday hamper containing essential items, seasonal goods, and gift cards for children's presents and groceries," says Girls Inc.

Hampers include grocery gift cards, a gift card for parents to purchase an item from their child's wish list, hygiene supplies, warm clothing items, a small gift for each child, all topped with something the entire family can enjoy, such as a board game.

Community members, businesses, and groups can support the campaign by sponsoring a family or otherwise making a financial contribution to the campaign. Every little bit helps and if you're not in a position to support the initiative financially, boosting their efforts through word-of-mouth is always welcome.

"By providing gift cards and carefully curated hampers, the campaign ensures parents retain choice and dignity while meeting specific needs of their children," says Girls Inc. "This approach not only provides practical support, but also fosters a sense of empowerment and holiday spirit for families. The Holiday Hamper Campaign is part of Girls Inc.'s ongoing commitment to empower the whole girl by supporting families, promoting wellbeing, and ensuring every girl and member of her family has what she needs to succeed and be strong, smart and bold."

Barb Wallace, Executive Director of Girls Inc. of York Region, says the initiative was inspired by the "clear need we were seeing" in the community to "bring a sense of holiday magic to children in low-income families while empowering parents with a choice – choice to shop for their own children, and choice to purchase culturally-relevant groceries that honour their family's traditions and dietary needs."

"When finances are tight, the holidays can be overwhelming for parents who want to give their children a joyful experience," says Wallace. "Our aim is to ease that pressure and ensure families feel supported and valued. Providing gift cards is intentional. It allows parents to choose what their child truly wants or needs. We're not just supplying gifts, we're supporting families with dignity and choice.

"For many children, the holiday season is where lasting memories are made. A small gift card or a shared family activity can spark joy and connection, something every child deserves. When someone sponsors a family or donates to the campaign, that generosity has an immediate impact. You're not only contributing, you're becoming a part of the family's holiday experience. The Holiday Hamper Campaign is part of our commitment to supporting the whole girl. When families feel secure and supported, girls are better able to learn, grow and build confidence."

"The holidays can be isolating for families facing financial hardship. This campaign reminds them they are not alone, their community is standing with them."

Wallace notes there is a particular need for gift cards and other items for teens.

Toys have been generously supported by the CP24 CHUM Christmas Wish.

Budgets can be tight for everyone around the holiday season and if you can't contribute to this campaign, consider your plans for New Year's Eve.

If you're celebrating in style in a dress you might only wear once, Girls Inc. will soon launch its annual Dress Drive to support Grade 8 and Grade 12 grads look their best at graduation and prom.

"If you have your New Year's Eve dress or a chance to clean out your closet and you've got fancy shoes, party dresses and things like that, we are collecting them for girls to go to graduation and prom," says Wallace. "We collect them, we go through them, and we set up a big event where hairdressers come in, makeup companies donate makeup, and we have all kinds of gifts for the girls to help them celebrate their special day. It's hard to get all that done [during Prom season], and we really focus on low-income girls, but we serve all girls."

For more information on how to support the ongoing Holiday Hamper Campaign or the upcoming Dress Drive, visit girlsincyork.org or call 905-830-0776.

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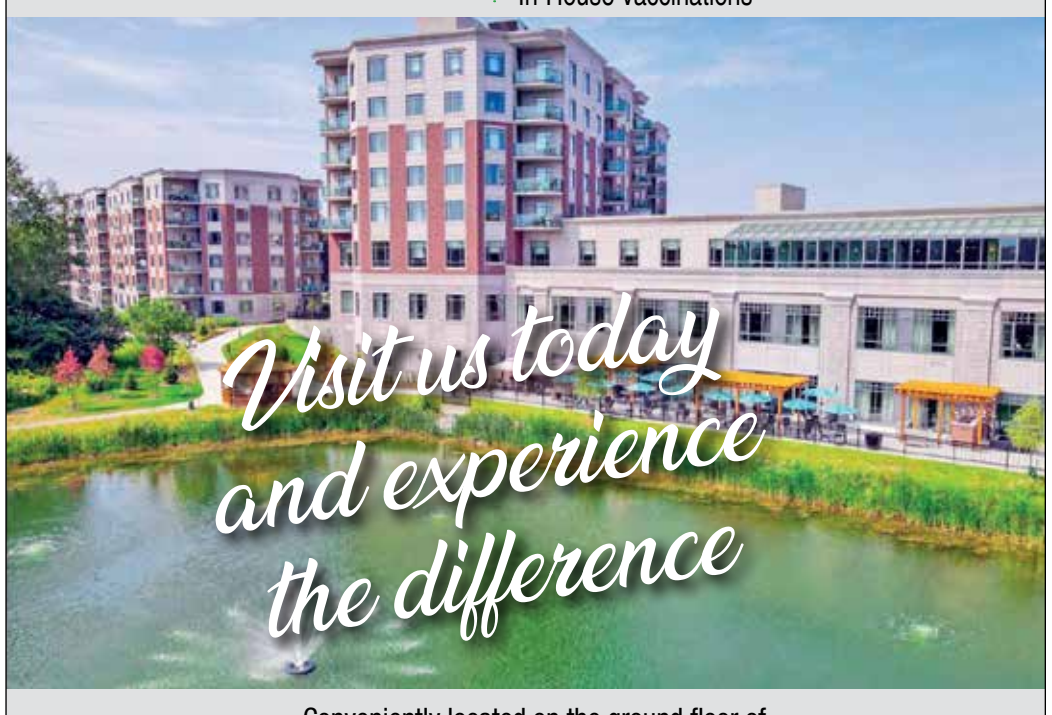

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Something for Everyone at Royal Canadian Legion bazaar

Christmas and Holiday Shopping is well underway and the Royal Canadian Legion community came together over the weekend to help residents cross a few items on their lists. Among those who participated in the Aurora branch's annual bazaar were (Top Row) Michael and Juliane; Janis and Albie; (Second Row) Victoria and Elizabeth; Kim and Tegan; (Third Row) Isabel and Kayla; and James.

Auroran photos by Glenn Rodger

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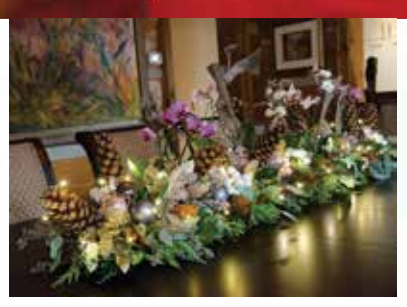

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Simon Howard and Cole Crawford lead Junior Tigers to 6-2 win over Cobourg to kick off three-game road trip

Tigers Captain Simon Howard, seen here restoring order versus Caledon, scored two goals to lead Aurora to a 6 – 2 win over Cobourg. **Auroran photo by Jim Stewart**

BY JIM STEWART

The Aurora Junior A Tigers kicked off a three-game road trip with a decisive 6-2 win over the Cougars in Cobourg on Monday night.

Simon Howard and Cole Crawford fired two goals each to lead the Tigers' 43-shot attack.

Nick Frasca and Gianfranco Rosella added one each as Aurora rolled to its sixth win in its last eight games.

Howard's power play goal opened the scoring at 2:58 of the first period and Tigers' captain described the go-ahead marker: "We were working on a new power play set up. It started with a pass to Cayden who drove to the net and the puck slipped off his stick to me. I was on a dry streak so it felt good to get one."

Egor Kozlov's tally at exactly 10:00 of the opening frame drew the Cougars even at 1-1.

A pair of goals by Frasca and Crawford five minutes apart by the midpoint of the second period established a 3-1 lead for the visitors.

Riley Mesa reduced Cobourg's deficit to one goal at 9:43, but Tigers' goaltender Matthew Humphries kept the home side off the scoreboard for the rest of the game. Humphries earned the W and stopped 33 of 35 shots.

Howard praised his goaltender's strong performance, especially at the beginning of the game when Aurora got off to a sluggish start: "It was a game that we were supposed to win, but we weren't ready to go. He made some big saves for us and he made huge saves when we were on the PK."

The Tigers pulled away in the third period by firing three unanswered goals. Howard scored his second of the game at 8:52-- finishing a perfect pass by prolific playmaker Anrijs Bundzenieks. Captain Howard described the quality of Bundzenieks's 16th assist of the season: "It was a good feed. It was right on my stick. I wasn't expecting it and either was the goalie."

Gianfranco Rosella made it 5-2 for Aurora at 12:52.

With 5:42 left in the third period, Crawford capped off the Tigers' victory with his second goal of the game.

Crawford is on a roll—scoring five goals and adding three assists in his last seven games.

The power forward's surge in performance mirrors the Tigers' markedly improved play over the same seven-game period.

Howard acknowledged his teammate's recent productivity.

"I expected it. He's young and it takes a while to get used to the league. I remember when he skated with us at camp. I see how hard he works every day so I'm not surprised by how well he's playing."

Onward to Milton and Toronto

The Tigers played back-to-back games against two OJHL West powerhouses on Friday and Saturday: the third-place Milton Menace and first-place Toronto Patriots.

On Friday night in Milton, the Tigers were edged 5-3 by the nationally-ranked Menace.

Smith's 12th goal of the season with one second left on the clock gave the visitors a 1-0 lead heading into the first intermission.

Thomas Leone's marker less than five minutes into the middle frame provided the visitors with a two-goal margin and the Junior Tigers looked poised to pull off an upset in Milton.

However, the Menace responded with a flurry of three goals in four minutes to close the second period.

Easton Lynds' power play goal at 14:34 cued the Milton comeback. Three minutes later, Matthew Babiy tied the game. Graeme MacAuley provided Milton with its first lead of the game less than one minute later and just before second intermission.

Captain Howard acknowledged Milton's level of play: "Their compete level is really high. We gave a big effort in Milton, but we didn't have all our guys: Frasca, Bode, me. Milton is well-coached and we could learn something from them in terms of their physicality."

A short-handed goal by Milton's Ivan Fabjan at 4:39 of the third period turned out to be the game-winner. The spirited Tigers responded 37 seconds later when Sebastian Catalano pulled his club to within one, but Lynds fired his second goal of the game at 12:19 to provide a two-goal cushion for the Menace.

On Saturday in Toronto, the Tigers were dumped 5-1 by the mighty Patriots. The OJHL West-leading club built a 5-0 lead by three-minute mark of the third period. Bundzenieks notched his 9th of the season with three seconds on the clock.

Howard credited the Pats' strengths: "We know it's a really good squad over there. They were ready to play and we got behind."

Toronto is 7-1 in November and has outscored its opponents 53-13 during that eight-game stretch. The fifth-best Junior A hockey club in Canada improved its record to 23-6-0-0.

Frasca promoted to Erie Otters of the OHL

Tigers' defenseman Nick Frasca signed with the Erie Otters of the OHL on Friday.

Frasca is the third Aurora Junior A player to be affiliated with and promoted to an OHL club this season. He joins Charlie Hotles (Flint Firebirds) and Humphries (Oshawa Generals) as a two-way player moving between the OJHL and OHL.

It's always a possibility that Frasca could stay up with the big club. The talented defender was in the lineup immediately for the Otters on Friday night in Erie's 3-2 OT loss to the Barrie Colts.

Pearson traded to the Collingwood Blues

Another Tigers defenseman was on the move on Saturday when Bode Pearson was dealt to Collingwood for Quinlan Clair. Pearson earned 14 assists in 67 games for the Tigers over parts of two seasons. In 28 games with the Blues this season, Clair has scored 3 goals and 11 assists.

The 6-foot, 185-pound defender is committed to NCAA D1 Niagara University for 2027-28.

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Sport Aurora celebrated its volunteers at Wicked Eats over the weekend. Inset: Volunteer of the Year was presented to Jim Thomson of the Aurora Tigers. **Auroran photos by Jim Stewart**

Thomson honored by Sport Aurora as Volunteer of the Year at 19th Annual Recognition Event

Sixteen local sports organizations applaud the selfless service of nineteen community volunteers

BY JIM STEWART
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Sport Aurora President Ron Weese welcomed more than 100 attendees to its annual Volunteer Recognition Event, "our longest-running event which has grown from recognizing the volunteers of seven organizations to today's event that recognizes the contributions made to seventeen organizations."

Weese noted that "across this Town, volunteer spirit is the backbone of the community."

In the comfy confines of Wicked Eats on Sunday morning, the long-time Sport Aurora executive and current Ward 1 Councillor reminded the honorees how valuable volunteers are.

"Without volunteers, municipal sport would not exist. Forty-two local sports organizations are completely dependent on volunteers. Over 2,500 people volunteer to make sport happen in Aurora. 70% of the programs could not run without volunteers. Those 2,500 volunteers contribute 85,000 hours per year. If you had to pay for those services, it would cost $2.125M. That's just in the sports organizations in Town. We recognize all volunteers as public assets."

Weese welcomed Volunteer Recognition Chair and Emcee Stephen Forsey to the stage and the dapper host—decked out in his timeless tuxedo—made light of his dashing appearance: "I turned down an opportunity to play James Bond to make this event today."

The long-time host of the feel-good event mentioned that many in the room "were voluntold – which started their careers as volunteers and look at you now!"

The use of "voluntold" elicited laughter and nodding from the engaged attendees who soaked in the ambience of Rob Stewart's restaurant as the aroma of appetizers wafted through the room.

The elegant Forsey thanked "prime sponsor E360, The Auroran newspaper for its coverage—most recently on our Breakfast of Champions event—and we want to thank Rob Stewart and the Wicked Eats staff for hosting us today."

MPP Dawn Gallagher-Murphy charmed the group, maintaining that volunteers contributed mightily "to the social fabric of the community." The MPP for Aurora-Newmarket observed that volunteers are "everywhere" and offered a Biblical allusion: "It is so much better to give than to receive. We must give back to our community, our children, their friends, so that these kids give back to their community, too. That—to me—is what it's all about."

Forsey segued skillfully and noted that the kids to which Gallagher-Murphy referred "are sports participants that range from 3 to 80."

The Emcee kept the train running on time and invited Mayor Tom Mrakas to the stage.

Mayor Mrakas nodded his appreciation to "the best-dressed man in the room—Stephen Forsey" and praised the volunteer spirit in Aurora as "one of the strongest in the province."

"It's what sets our community apart. The real strength of our sports community is you—the volunteers. Our leagues just don't exist—they thrive. You've created a space for athletes to grow—to develop friendships and skills. On behalf of the Town of Aurora, thank you for the service and the passion you bring. Congratulations to every one being honored today."

After the Mayor's address, Weese presented the Sport Aurora President's Award to Aurora Junior A Tigers Governor and long-time Emcee of Sport Aurora's Breakfast of Champions Jim Thomson.

The former NHLer, Aurora Sports Hall of Fame inductee, and tireless contributor to the social fabric of the Town expressed his comfort with the festivities at Wicked Eats: "This is a family event."

Thomson spoke with fondness about volunteering with his sons and his Aurora Tigers players at community events and praised the hard work demonstrated by "former Mayor Geoff Dawe and current Mayor Tom Mrakas who've appeared at so many sports and charity events with me and do so much work behind the scene to support local sports. I'm honored to be with all the volunteers being recognized today."

After Thomson received the prestigious award to much appreciative applause and posed for a family photo, the wonderfully-efficient Forsey took attendees through a whirlwind tour of volunteers who have made outstanding contributions to the community.

Kevin Daly (York Oldtimers Hockey League), Natasha Tassone (Central York Girls Hockey Association), Rob Sharko (Aurora Barbarians Rugby Football Club), Gordon Weir (Aurora Lawn Bowling Club), Andy Mitchell and Heather Papa (Special Olympics—Aurora), Joanne Reiter-Rey (Aurora Minor Hockey Association), Steve Woods (Aurora Junior A Tigers), Fernanda Carrillo (York Artistic Swimming), Gary Armstrong (Storm Volleyball), Amina Hashgari (Aurora Skating Club), Jessie-Lynn Boadway (Toronto and North York Pony Club), and Dan Hale (Aurora Diggers Girls Softball Association) were each lauded for their efforts by an organizational colleague and the honorees delivered concise speeches that were appreciated by the dozens in attendance.

Also recognized but unable to attend the ceremony were Anne Bailey-Neuendorf of the York Region Football Association, Lorri McKay of the Team Ontario Astros, and the Aurora Soccer Club's quartet of honored volunteers: Hamed Fallahnia, Joe Artega, Brian Casey, and John Aird.

Paisley fires game-winning shootout goal as Junior Panthers edge Brampton Canadettes 2-1

BY JIM STEWART

Lily Paisley returned from injury on Wednesday night at SARC and the Central York Junior Panthers couldn't be happier.

The talented goal-scorer fired the game-winner in the eighth round of a shootout to edge the Brampton Canadettes 2-1.

Panthers Head Coach Steve Dempsey described the game-winning-goal and Paisley's resilience in her first game back after a five-game stint on the IL.

"It was a great goal. She came down the far side and made a nice move backhand to forehand and went inside the right post. It was a gut feeling to put Lily into the shootout, even though she was playing through a serious shoulder injury. She didn't have to worry about contact and we had limited her shifts during regulation and overtime. She was only on the ice twice before getting back in the game for the shootout. Lily's had the opportunity to be on the big stage before where's been a great performer."

The other local hero on Wednesday night was Panthers' goaltender Jamie Sanford. The athletic netminder allowed just one goal in regulation, overtime, and all eight rounds of the shootout to earn the two-point win.

Coach Dempsey praised Sanford's play between the pipes: "Jamie's been on the big stage, too, and she thrives in these kinds of situations. She's an even-keeled kid and Jamie made the right saves at the right time. She kept making save after save after save in the shootout and shut down a Brampton team that had been on a hot streak."

Indeed, Sanford prevailed in this goaltenders' duel during which her

Central York forward Lily Paisley fired the Shootout winner to sink Brampton 2 – 1 in OWHA action at the SARC.

Auroran photo by Jim Stewart

Canadette counterpart, Sydney Sammut, turned aside 45 of the 46 shots she faced to earn a point for Brampton.

It was Central York's second consecutive win after snapping a five-game slump on home ice last Sunday with a 4-3 win over the North York Storm.

Brampton's Kaitlin Bayer opened the scoring at 7:18 of the first period to give the visitors a 1-0 lead.

High-scoring Audrey Martone finished a pass from playmaker Ellie Lewington to tie the game at 8:43 of the second period. Lewington earned her 10th assist of the season on Martone's 12th goal. Martone is the Panthers' second-leading scorer with 21 points and moved into 16th in the OWHA U22 Elite scoring race with her game-tying tally.

After a scoreless third period during which the Panthers outshot the visitors 18-4 but went 0 for 4 on the power play, the home side dominated Brampton in OT. Despite outshooting the Canadettes 6-0 in the extra period of play, Sammut saved her side from sudden death and frustrated Central York shooters through seven rounds of the shootout, as well.

Coach Dempsey rued his power play's ineffectiveness, but offered some context for the specialty team's 0-for-6 performance versus the Canadettes.

"We had a 5-on-3 power play and I called a timeout. The power play stalled because we haven't had enough practice on it this year, especially with our expanded 48-game regular season. We have more games and fewer practices which is not the best situation for skills development. It's one of the things we need to work on to get better. We only have one practice this week and we can only work on so many things."

Despite the lack of practice time, Coach Dempsey's Junior Panthers improved their third-place record to 16-4-0-3 with the shootout win over Brampton.

Central York roared back into action on Saturday night when they hosted the second-place Nepean Wildcats (17-3-1-0).

Despite a hat trick from leading scorer Annabella Van Berkel and Paisley's second goal in as many games, the visitors prevailed 6-4.

Van Berkel scored a goal in each period and Paisley pumped in a power play goal in the second period, but the Panthers never led in this one.

Abby Pak and Zoe Ordanis continued their productive seasons by tallying two assists each for Central York. Despite the team's impressive offensive effort on Saturday afternoon, the Panthers surrendered three power play goals and an empty netter to the high-flying Wildcats.

With her three-goal performance, "Big Goal" Van Berkel moved into a tie for 5th spot in the OWHA U22 Elite scoring race with 22 goals and 7 assists in 21 games played.

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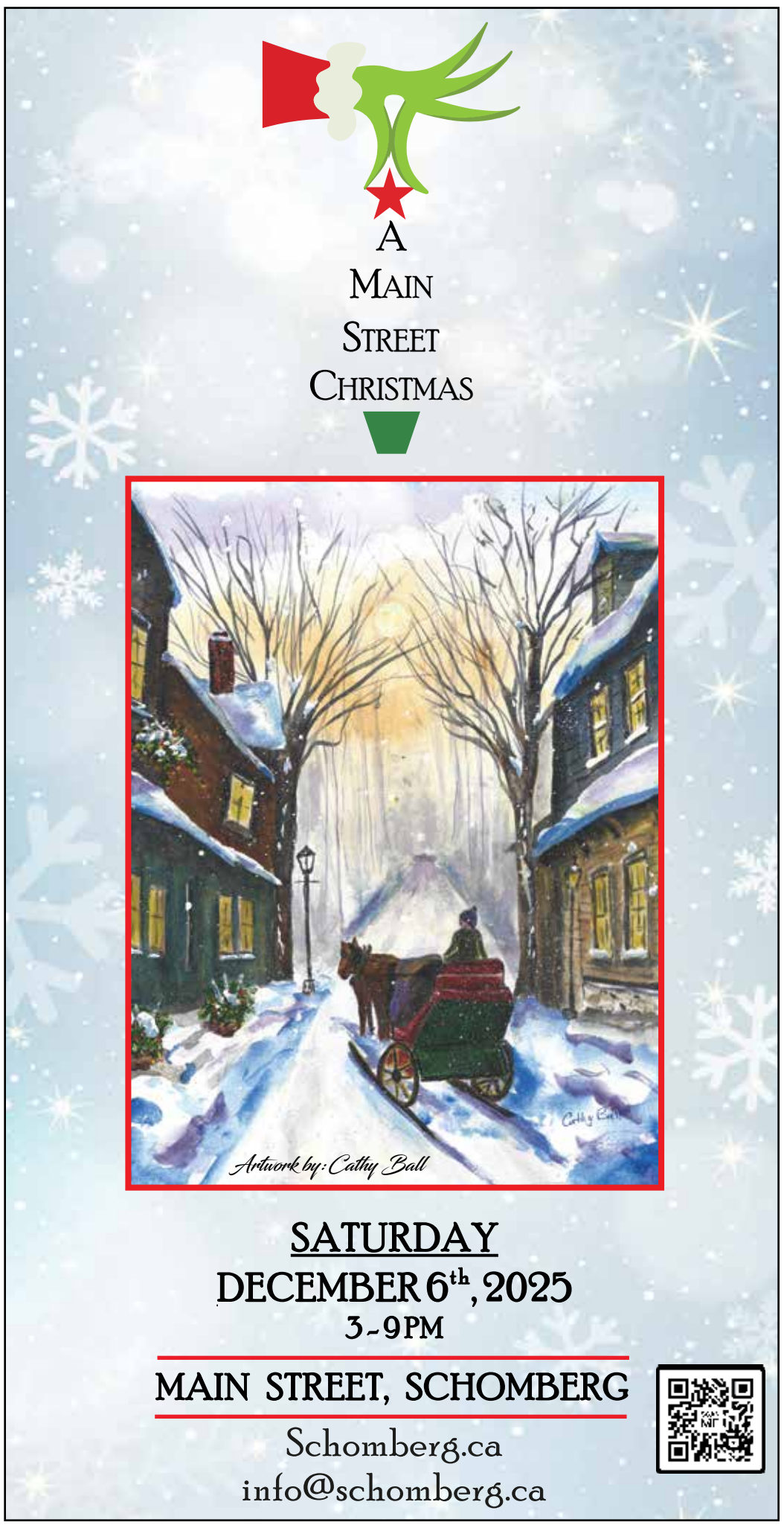


Micak Contemporary Art Gallery features the works of seven GTA artists at its first anniversary celebration

Artist JR Newton is pictured with his painting "Silk and Ashes." **Auroran photo by Jim Stewart**

BY JIM STEWART
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

The Micak Contemporary Art Gallery celebrated its first anniversary by presenting the works of seven GTA artists at a reception on Thursday evening.

Owner Katie Micak welcomed visitors and displayed the works of Lisa Cristinzo, Michelle Jamieson, Steven Laurie, Heidi McKenzie, Edmund Mok, Brenda Neives, and J.R. Newton at her St. Andrew's Village plaza gallery.

Four of the seven artists — Cristinzo, McKenzie, Mok, and Newton – were in attendance and mingled freely with the attendees.

The motif linking all the artists' works, according to Micak, was "New Mythologies" and she explained that "the group exhibition explores how stories, symbols, and archetypes are created, remembered, and re-imagined through contemporary art."

The painting that encapsulated the exhibition's motif masterfully was JR Newton's "Silk and Ashes"—a haunting work that features foreground techniques belonging to the Renaissance Masters, but also offers a contemporary twist of "meticulous realism" to form the background.

Jarring juxtapositions take place in Newton's visual narrative: a dynamic female in the foreground could belong in any Da Vinci painting, but lurking in the background as a challenge to the hero's well-being are smokestacks belching effluents—marring the character's future. The centrepiece of the painting could, indeed, belong in a Renaissance gallery, but the background images are disturbingly modern. Newton seems to be celebrating human beauty bathed in radiant light, but it's about to be inundated by the dark side of humanity represented by unbridled industrialism and its impact on climate change.

There is a serene confidence in Newton's protagonist—in her eyes and the placement of her hands--but inbound smoke creates the same kind of green miasma that comprised Neo's murky world in The Matrix. Newton engaged with his many appreciative fans and he discussed "bringing old to new—where futurism meets surrealism. It's the Renaissance meeting the Apocalypse. She's asking herself: Is there hope?"

Newton's propensity towards grand Renaissance style led to a recent opportunity to augment his impressive portfolio by "creating thirty-six paintings that capture the stories of The Bible for Our Lady of Peace Church in Milton – under the scrutiny of my patron."

It's evident that Newton's compelling paintings are in demand not only in Milton, but in Aurora. One of the highlights of Thursday night's reception was the unveiling of a portrait of Mayor Tom Mrakas, painted by Newton. The stunning likeness—complete with the Mayor's glittering chain of office—was presented to Mayor Mrakas by the hospitable gallery owner "as a thank you to the Town for its support of the gallery in its first year of operation in Aurora."

After the presentation of Newton's painting to the appreciative Mayor, a lively and engaging Q and A ensued during which attendees connected with the insights offered by Cristinzo, McKenzie, Mok, and Newton.

It was clear that the artists and audience enjoyed each other's company and, as the refreshments were consumed by attendees, Newton noted succinctly in an aside that "It's a fun show."

The pleasant, celebratory atmosphere to which the gregarious painter alluded was on full display on Thursday night at the Micak Contemporary Art Gallery's first anniversary celebration.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

From page 5

almost no detail on other revenue.

This triggered some sensible questions about where public money has been spent and where. How the Town assesses financial statements, without an audit, was asked by Councillor Gallo at the meeting. Two policies were identified, and the ASHoF qualifies under the two policies. They fall short of $250,000 in annual revenues, and their $109,000 of reserves is less than their annual operating expenses of $185,000.

The second question from Councillor Gallo regarding how the Town provides oversight beyond these two policies remains. Simply explained by the Deputy Treasurer, there are none.

I value the Sports Hall of Fame and am proud of the work done by Sport Aurora as the founder. This three-year founding was accomplished through a Trillium grant, numerous Sponsors, and 100% volunteer support.

I will not respond in detail regarding the inaccuracies and purposes of Sport Aurora's "funding." Sport Aurora can do that if they wish. I will refute the claim, however, that $50,000 was added to the Town's budget for Sport Aurora after "behind-the-scenes" discussions. No funding was received. This narrative is false, and it is also insulting to everyone.

Curiously, he raises a question that he says comes from "some residents" regarding Conflict of Interest by the Mayor. The Mayor's Board participation on the ASHoF Board is not for me to comment on here. And for the record, the Mayor has already vetoed this majority-approved Motion using his Strong Mayor Powers.

I will comment on the "natural question" posed by Mr. Khan, regarding what he perceives as my own conflict. It seems to be his personal theme. The Legal Counsel for the ASHoF filed a Conflict-of-Interest Complaint against me with the Integrity Commissioner two years ago. The complaint was investigated and dismissed without merit. The Integrity Commissioner noted that elected officials are encouraged to participate in community agencies to stay connected, provided they recuse themselves on monetary issues at Council. I also took the opportunity to speak to our own Town Clerk at the beginning of my term to learn how to avoid conflicts, and I have always taken his advice.

I am disappointed that this matter has been extended beyond the Council Chambers because it does nothing to help the ASHoF in their worthy efforts to local sport heroes. I will, however, not stand by and allow inaccurate and pejorative statements to be made against responsible fiscal governance, nor any service organization in our community.

Councillor Ron Weese
Aurora

Silver Stars gala shines bright in Aurora, Celebrating Women Who Paved the Way

Auroran photo by Brittany Grenci

BY BRITTANY GRENCI
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

The Royal Rose Gallery in Aurora glowed with energy and admiration on the evening of November 8 as guests gathered for an intimate celebration of Silver Stars—a moving docuseries that spotlights twelve remarkable Canadian women who have broken barriers across STEM, sports, and the creative arts.

The event, hosted by A WWB Production Inc., honoured these twelve "Silver Stars" whose achievements and perseverance have illuminated the path for generations to come.

Friends, family, and local supporters filled the gallery from 7 to 9 p.m., joining Executive Producer Lanette Ware-Bushfield in celebrating the women at the heart of this inspiring initiative.

Mayor Tom Mrakas was also in attendance, expressing his appreciation for and pride in the Silver Stars initiative.

"Art and culture are very important aspects of the Town of Aurora. I'm very proud that these Silver Stars are showcased here in Aurora so all the young women in our community are able to see that women can achieve incredible things in the world," he said.

Each Silver Star featured in the series embodies resilience, brilliance, and mentorship. These women are masters of their craft—trailblazers who have not only shaped their industries but also paved the way for those following in their footsteps.

The November 8 gala also marked the reveal of the official Silver Stars portraits that will be featured in their upcoming Calendar. The calendar serves as both a visual celebration and a fundraising initiative, with proceeds supporting continued storytelling projects that amplify women's voices across Canada.

Ware-Bushfield, the creative force behind A WWB Production, has long been dedicated to producing stories that move people to think differently. Through her company, she develops original film and television content spanning drama, comedy, and social impact—always with a focus on uplifting underrepresented voices and challenging cultural clichés.

Speaking at the event, Ware-Bushfield expressed deep gratitude to everyone who has supported Silver Stars from its inception.

"These women have shown us what's possible, and it's our responsibility to carry that light forward," she said.

As attendees mingled among the newly unveiled portraits, it was clear that the evening was more than a celebration—it was a moment of connection and reflection. The Silver Stars Gala encapsulated everything the series stands for: mentorship, resilience, and the beauty of shared experience.

The Silver Stars Calendar is now available for pre-order. To reserve your copy or to learn more about upcoming projects, contact A WWB Production at info@awwbproduction.ca.

Aurora Food Pantry relocating to Mary Street in move increasing accessibility

From page 1

January 30 to facilitate the transition.

The new space, they say, will offer them the chance to maintain current service levels while also enhancing the visitor experience.

Given Mary Street's proximity to Wellington Street East, the new location will also be significantly more accessible by transit.

Donations can be dropped off at the new location beginning on January 19.

"We are thrilled to begin this new chapter," said Aurora Food Pantry Executive Director Sandra Seepaul. "With new beginnings come new possibilities, and this move will allow us to create a warm, dignified space where our community members can access the support they need.

The new home of the Aurora Food Pantry will boast 6,500 square feet of space, allowing for an enhanced user experience and will be open Tuesdays from 9 – 11.30 a.m., Thursdays from 5.30 – 7 p.m., and on Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 12.30 p.m.

Appointments can also be booked at aurorafoodpantry.ca or by calling 905-841-1577.

"From its humble beginnings in the basement of a local church in 1990, the Aurora Food Pantry has grown into a vital community resource, serving over 400 families each month," said the Food Pantry in a statement. "In September 2025 alone, the Pantry supported 437 families, representing 1,309 individuals. Food bank usage continues to rise across Ontario with more than one million Ontarians relying on food banks in 2024. Locally, the Aurora Food Pantry experienced a 27 per cent increase in usage between 2023 and 2024, and overall demand has doubled since April 2022.

"As with any relocation, there are additional expenses associated with the renovations and updates required to accommodate the Pantry's programs and the changing needs of its clients. The Aurora Food Pantry operates entirely through the generosity of public donations and community partnerships. With rising costs for rent, utilities, and the upcoming move, the Pantry is encouraging residents and local businesses to consider becoming donors to help offset these expenses and sustain ongoing operations.

"With Giving Tuesday on December 2, this is a meaningful opportunity to support the Aurora Food Pantry at a time when community help is needed most. Community support remains essential to ensuring that no one in Aurora goes hungry."

The Aurora Food Pantry has been located at 350 Industrial Parkway South for the last 15 years, in a space shared until recently with the York Region Food Network, Hope House Hospice, and Big Brothers Big Sisters Peel York (BBBSPY).

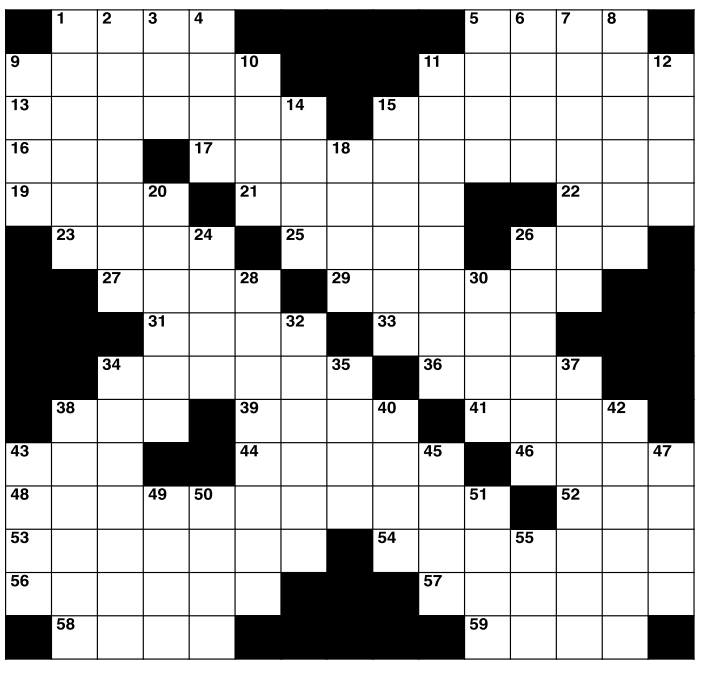
While BBBSPY remains in place, the York Region Food Network recently moved to Newmarket, while Hope House Hospice has relocated to Yonge Street, just south of Church Street.

"The Aurora Food Pantry extends heartfelt thanks to Irvine Generations, who generously provided affordable space at 350 Industrial Parkway South and supported the organization throughout its growth over the past 15 years," said the Pantry of the former Aurora Cable building.

For more information on the Aurora Food Pantry, including its services and current needs, visit aurorafoodpantry.ca.

CROSSWORD

Puzzle No.TANOV2725 • *Solution in Classifieds*



CLUES ACROSS

1. Difficult
5. Coarsely ground corn
9. There's one for the "world"
11. Loved Romeo
13. Sticky situation
15. Pelvic areas
16. An informal debt instrument
17. Cannot be repaired surgically
19. A device attached to a workbench
21. Related on the mother's side
22. Sound unit
23. __ Sagan, astronomer
25. Utah city
26. A disappointing effort
27. Steal goods during a riot
29. Wakes up
31. Hair salon service
33. Serenaded
34. Looked intensely
36. U.S. Air Force expert Robert F.
38. A type of cast
39. One's duty
41. Where golfers begin
43. Make a mistake
44. Semitic sun god
46. Ancient Greek City
48. Having had the head cut off
52. A place to stay
53. Unwise
54. Most unnatural
56. Dennis is a notable one
57. Ointments
58. Students' exam
59. Leaked blood

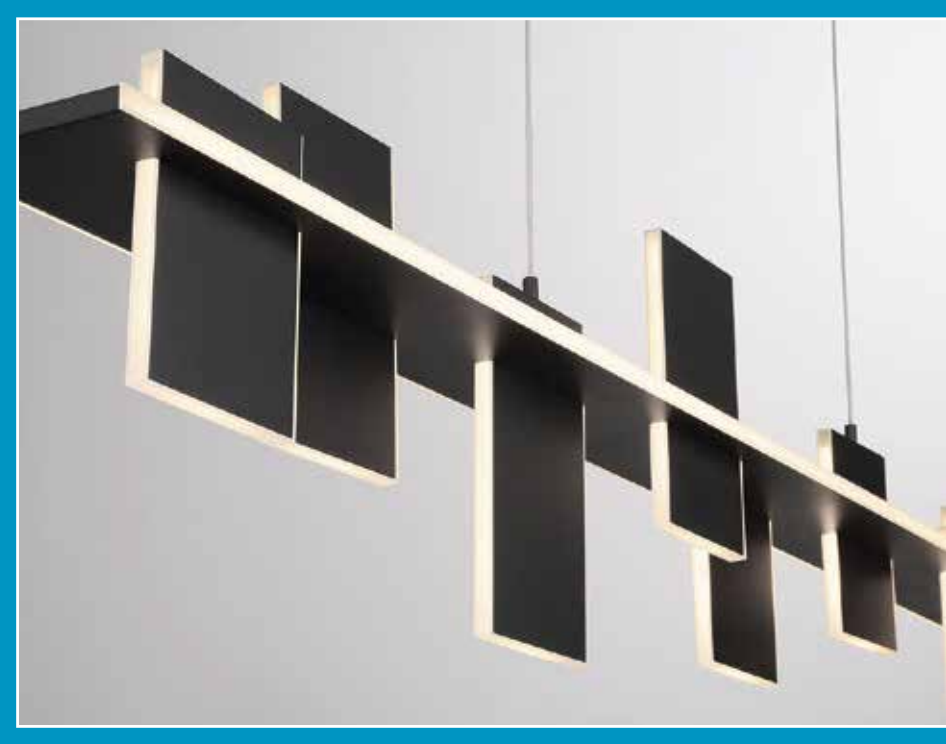
CLUES DOWN

1. Brave
2. Act of awakening
3. Jest at
4. Sandwich store
5. Chapter of the Koran
6. Dismounted
7. Small vehicle
8. Irked
9. One who earns by disreputable dealings
10. Monetary unit of Samoa
11. Long, mournful lamentation
12. Weight unit
14. Alone, single
15. Decreases
18. Indicates beside
20. Worn by exposure to the weather
24. A body of traditions
26. College students' ultimate goal
28. Amino acid
30. Nasal mucus
32. US government entity
34. Swinish
35. Legislative body in Russia
37. Grant an exemption to
38. Put in advance
40. Satisfy
42. Felt
43. Mild yellow Dutch cheese made in balls
45. Witnesses
47. Picnic invaders
49. Gasteyer and de Armas are two
50. Ancient person of Scotland
51. Cheerless
55. Unwell

Santa Claus lights up Yonge Street

Hundreds of families lined Yonge Street on Saturday night to catch a glimpse of the jolly man in red himself at Aurora's annual Santa Under the Stars parade, which began at Orchard Heights, moving south to Murray Drive.

Auroran photos by Glenn Rodger



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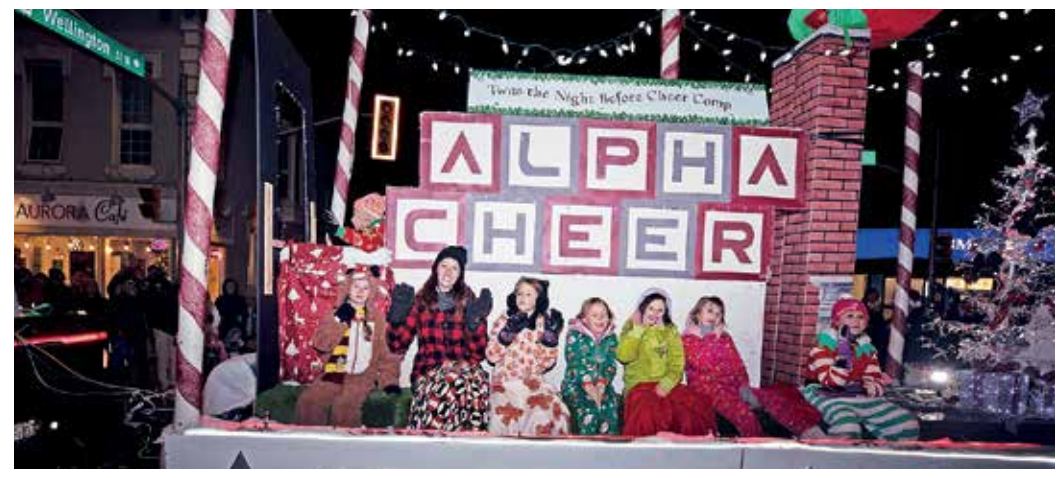

This year's parade included pomp and circumstance led by Aurora's Town Crier John Webster, the St. Andrew's Pipes and Drums, and the marching band from Cardinal Carter Catholic High School. The event included dazzling floats from community organizations, teams, and businesses, and amongst those participating in event were MPs Sandra Cobena and Costas Menegakis; MPPs Dawn Gallagher Murphy and Michael Parsa; Mayor Tom Mrakas, and Councillors Ron Weese, Michael Thompson, John Gallo, and Harold Kim; and Aurora's 2025 Citizen of the Year Sandy Bundy.

Auroran photos by Glenn Rodger

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PARSA'S PERSPECTIVE

Michael Parsa, MPP
Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill

As the colder weather settles in and the days get just a little shorter, many of us start shifting into winter mode, pulling out the heavier coats, checking the snow tires, and trying to remember where we stored the ice scraper last spring. It's a familiar routine, but one that always seems to arrive faster than we expect.

This is a good time to look around our homes and make sure we're ready for whatever the season brings. Simple things like sealing drafty windows, testing smoke and carbon-monoxide alarms, or stocking up on essentials can make a real difference during the colder months. And if you have older neighbours or family members, a quick call or visit to see if they need a hand can go a long way. Winter is easier when we look out for one another.

It's also worth keeping an eye on weather updates and local advisories as conditions start to change. Our public works teams, first responders, and community services are already preparing, clearing routes, checking equipment, and making sure supports are in place. I want to thank them for the work they do every year, often before dawn and long after most of us are home warm and safe.

As we head into the winter season, let's stay prepared, connected, and continue to support one another. With a little planning and a lot of community spirit, we can make the months ahead safe and enjoyable for everyone.

Stay warm and all the best.

THiNGS... *you ought to know*

NOVEMBER 28 – 30

The first weekend of Aurora's two-weekend Christmas Market will take place at Aurora Town Square from 5 – 8.30 p.m. Admission is free. Enjoy the holiday season at Aurora's Christmas Market - one of the Top 100 Festivals and Events in Ontario! This event is filled with good cheer, hands-on workshops and activities, fantastic seasonal vendors, food vendors and more. Check out different vendors on-site each night.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 19

Holiday Wreath Workshop – Led by Garden Aurora, join the Aurora Historical Society at Hillary House National Historic Site to customize your own natural wreath to hang this holiday season. All materials provided, but participants are welcome to bring their own accessories too. See Hillary House NHS decorated for the festive winter season! Sessions: 10 a.m., 12 noon, 2 p.m., or 4 p.m. Tickets are $50 with supplies included. For more, including tickets, visit aurorahs.com.

DECEMBER 5 – 7

The second weekend of Aurora's two-weekend Christmas Market will take place at Aurora Town Square from 5 – 8.30 p.m. Admission is free. Enjoy the holiday season at Aurora's Christmas Market - one of the Top 100 Festivals and Events in Ontario! This event is filled with good cheer, hands-on workshops and activities, fantastic seasonal vendors, food vendors and more. Check out different vendors on-site each night.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6

FIRESIDE HOLIDAY MARKET, hosted by Sisterz & Co. in support of the Aurora Food Pantry today from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Northridge Community Church, 15338 Leslie St, Aurora, ON. Shop local for gifts, crafts, jewelry & treats. Free admission & festive family fun. Free photos with Santa!

* * * *

Victorian Christmas Afternoon Tea at Hillary House National Historic Site. Step back in time and into the holiday spirit with afternoon tea at Hillary House National Historic Site. Enjoy the historic atmosphere and learn about Christmas traditions during the Victorian period. The catered tea menu includes a pot of tea or warm apple cider, sandwiches, scones, and a variety of holiday-themed desserts. Pick from two seatings: 12:00 noon or 2:30 pm. Tickets at $35pp can be purchased on the AHS website www.aurorahs.com.

* * * *

York Symphony Orchestra Presents: Má vlast: "My Country". Romantic Czech composer Bedřich Smetana's six symphonic poems honouring both the natural beauty and the history of his Bohemian homeland are rarely performed together as a cycle outside Czechia. However, YSO's music director Denis Mastromonaco, who has been a regular guest conductor for the West Bohemian Symphony Orchestra, will bring it to life here in Aurora. Don't miss this rare event! 8 p.m. at Trinity Anglican Church.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14

A Family Christmas at Hillary House National Historic Site – 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Hillary House is decorated for the Holidays! Bring the whole family to enjoy some festive treats, holiday crafts, and take a picture with Santa Claus. Tickets can be purchased through the Aurora Historical Society at aurorahs.com.

ONGOING

Partagez le Francais: Ce groupe accueille les ADULTES / 18+ (des francophones aux débutants capables de converser) - qui cherchent à mettre en pratique leurs compétences Conversationnelle en français. Over Zoom with a nominal fee of $2.50. RSVP by visiting meetup.com/Partagez-le-francais. For more information, email partagez.york@outlook.com.

* * * *

Support AbuseHurts' Delivering Hope Full Circle Program textile recycling and donation program. A greater number of people are wanting to donate or get rid of unwanted items, increasing the need for more outlets being available to receive the items. This program will provide a convenient way for people to donate or get rid of used/unwanted clothing, blankets, linens and furniture and will help lessen the amount of items ending up in landfills. Materials that were previously perceived as waste will now be seen as a valuable resource further encouraging redistribution. The items will be recycled in the following ways: To be given to individuals who are survivors of violence and are transitioning from shelters into new homes; To be sold in our store; To be sold to a textile recycler, which makes for an ongoing source of funding for Abuse Hurts enabling them to provide their services to the thousands of people that require them each year. When and Where: Monday and Wednesday, every week, 10 a.m. – 4 p.m., with 30-minute time slots – only 1 drop off per time slot. If you do not have an appointment, we cannot accept your donation. The Abuse Hurts Warehouse is located at 1208 Gorham St, Unit 4, Newmarket - rear unloading dock. Visit AbuseHurts.ca to select your drop off time slot.

PUZZLE SOLUTION

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Year Round! Pick-up available!
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STORAGE

STORAGE AVAILABLE: 20 yard sea can container for storage located in Nobleton. Safe location. For more information, please call 905-859-0817

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I WANT YOUR OLD CAR!

Porsche 356/911/912,
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Help keep our hospice kitchen table full

GIVING TUESDAY Dec 2

Our residential hospice is unique ensuring that food is available not only for residents but also for their families, so everyone has what they need while they are here.

However, food costs are significant in order to keep our hospice comfortable for residents and their families. **Margaret Bahen Hospice needs between $5,000 and $6,000 per month, or about $70,000 per year, to support the kitchen.**

Our kitchen at a glance:

- Food is fully funded by donations and provided to residents and families at no cost.
- Since opening in 2017, Margaret Bahen Hospice has served 1,476 residents and over 4,400 family members.
- The kitchen table is a place for families to meet with loved ones and feel a small sense of “normal.”
- The hospice has hosted family holiday dinners so loved ones can share special moments together.
- Kitchen operations are run by a large number of volunteers each day of the week and one staff member.

This Giving Tuesday, please consider a gift to help offset our kitchen food costs so residents and their families can continue to share warm, home cooked meals together.

Visit: www.myhospice.ca/giving-tuesday

SCAN HERE

Margaret Bahen Hospice for York Region

Doane House HOSPICE

653 Queen Street, Newmarket ON L3Y 2J1 | donations@myhospice.ca | 905-967-1500 ext. 135

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Family owned since 1913

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The Christmas tree is a timeless symbol of the beauty and joy of the season, playing a cherished role in countless family traditions.

CANADIAN-GROWN! Choose from our selection of popular varieties and sizes.

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- Soft, lightly fragrant green needles with a silvery underside
- Firm branches for heavier ornaments
- Excellent needle retention for a long lasting tree

Scots Pine

- Soft fragrance that will last throughout the holiday season and long, dark green needles
- Sturdy branches for heavier ornaments
- Excellent needle retention

FRESH CUT & SECURED TO YOUR VEHICLE
We'll give your tree a fresh cut for better water absorption, bale and secure to your vehicle, all FREE! Delivery service available. Contact us for details.

Don't Forget!

STAFRESH
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Bring the Season to Life

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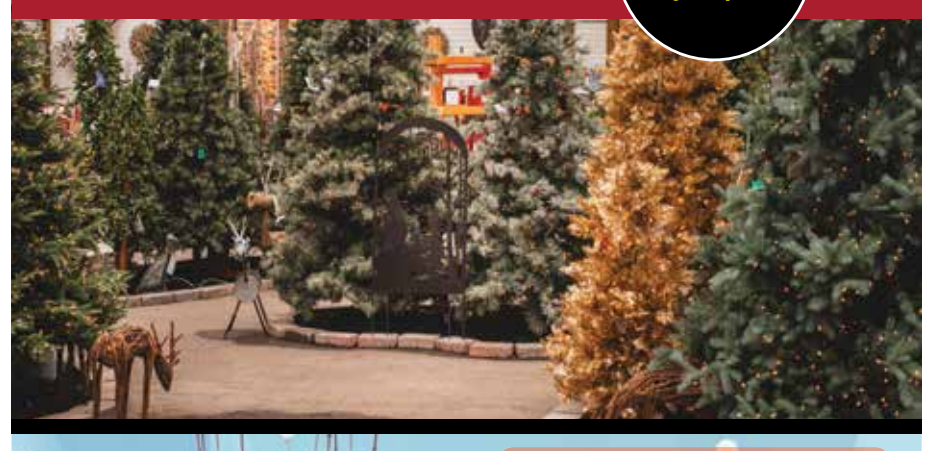
*Regular retail price. No price adjustments on previous purchases. While supplies last. No rainchecks. Black Friday prices in effect November 28 - 30, 2025. Cyber Monday prices effective December 1, 2025 online only.

NOVEMBER 28-30, 2025

BLACK FRIDAY DEALS

All Everlasting Christmas Trees

SAVE UP TO 50% Off* regular price



SAVE 40% Off* regular price

11" pot

Classic Christmas Urn Arrangement
77.99 Reg. $129.99

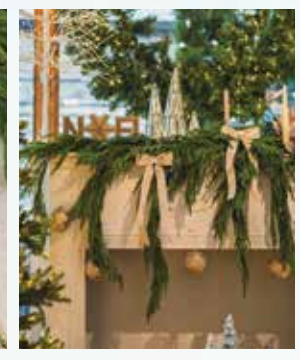
Assorted Urn Arrangements
Starting at $59.99

SAVE 20% Off* regular price

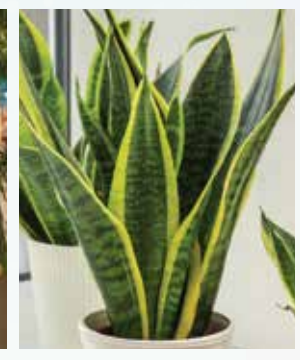
Sale excludes Evergreen Elegance, Evergreen Accents, and Custom Designed Urns.

SAVE 40% Off*

Ornaments
Starting at $4.99



Norfolk Pine
(Everlasting & Fresh)
Starting at $12.99



Tropical Snake Plants
Starting at $24.99

Fresh Roping Starting at $39.99

Ontario Mix Bough 20.99 5lb. bundle. Reg. $34.99

Pre-Potted Gifting Trees 47.99 Reg. $79.99

SAVE 50% Off*

Plush Throw
20.00 Reg. $39.99

Holly & Mistletoe Pillow
20.00 Reg. $39.99

Holiday Totes
Starting at $9.99

CYBER MONDAY SALE!

ONE DAY ONLY, ONLINE ONLY - Monday, December 1, 2025

SAVE THE TAX*

*Monday, December 1, 2025 only. We will reduce your purchase by the amount equivalent to the HST. Discount applies to regular retail priced in-stock items only and does not apply to previously purchased product(s). Discount does not apply to Value Priced Items, Layered Fraser Fir Everlasting Christmas trees, select Jellycat products, Gift Cards, Landscape Design Service, Delivery Service, Planting Service, Memberships, Custom Design Service, Bulk Soil Deliveries and General Labour. Not valid with any other offer or discount.

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