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# THE AUROORAN

Aurora's Community Newspaper

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FREE

WEEK OF JANUARY 8, 2026

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**WELCOMING THE NEW YEAR** – Aurora residents celebrated the arrival of 2026 in style on New Year's Eve as the Town hosted its annual Family First Night at Aurora Town Square. Pictured here enjoying the festivities are Melanie, Lily, Kevin and Nate. For more, see Page 20.

Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger

## Aurora set for musical revival as Winter Blues Festival returns to community

BY BROCK WEIR  
EDITOR  
LOCAL JOURNALISM  
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Local music lovers know that few things warm the cold winter nights better than hot jazz and good company.

For the last five years, winters around here have been a little bit chilly without the blues to go around, but February is shaping up to be a scorcher as the Aurora Winter Blues Festival rises from

the ashes of a COVID pause with a hand from the Aurora Cultural Centre.

Music Aurora, long-time proponents of the Aurora Winter Blues Festival, have formally passed the torch to the Aurora Cultural Centre to put the Festival back on the map – and the results are four days of entertainment spanning six shows and four live blues workshops between February 26 and March 1.

“I think of all the hard work that was put in by [former Aurora residents] Jamie and Helen Macdonald to build this up, it’s nice to see it coming back,” says Music Aurora’s Greg Smith.

Adds Music Aurora’s Stewart McLaren: “The love of music and then the fun of putting the event on was the main thing that drove it.”

The Aurora Winter Blues Festival

*Continued on page 11*



**NEW YEAR, NEW MUSIC** – The arrival of a New Year signals fresh starts all around, and the Aurora Winter Blues Festival is set to receive a new lease on life as the Aurora Cultural Centre revives the popular February event. Pictured here in the Aurora Town Square performance hall are Music Aurora’s Stewart McLaren, Derek Andrews of the Aurora Cultural Centre, and Music Aurora’s Greg Smith.

Auroran photo by Brock Weir

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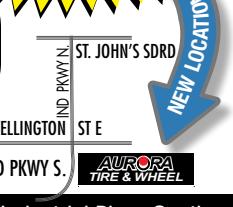
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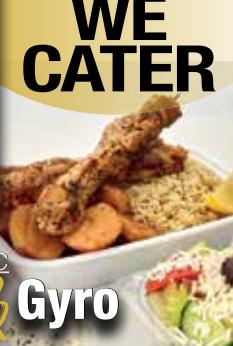
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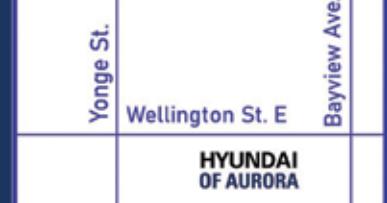
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# Aurora's McNeill to be inducted into Order of Canada

BY BROCK WEIR  
EDITOR  
LOCAL JOURNALISM  
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Aurora resident Irene Y. McNeill will be inducted into the Order of Canada this year as a member.

The long-time sailing advocate was among 80 Canadians announced to the Order by Governor General Mary Simon last week as part of the Order's traditional New Year's Honours list.

"The Order of Canada fosters a sense of pride and cohesion in our country," said the Governor General in a statement. "Every appointment celebrates not only the talent, expertise, and dedication of individuals, but also the countless lives they have touched through their work, vision and contributions."

"Their commitment extends beyond borders, inspiring progress in our communities, our country, and around the world. I offer my heartfelt congratulations to each new appointee on this well-deserved recognition."

McNeill has been recognized for her contribution to the sports community.

"Irene McNeill has helped develop the sport of sailing in Canada and beyond," reads her citation. "She is frequently invited to officiate at grassroots and elite competitions, and is the first Canadian woman to earn the designation of International Race Officer. She also co-founded the LEAP program to encourage girls'



Photo courtesy of the Etobicoke Yacht Club

participation in the sport."

Other notable Canadians included on the Honours List are Rosalie Abella, the first Jewish woman to serve on Canada's Supreme Court, and children's songwriter and entertainer Raffi.

This year's recipients will receive their honours at ceremonies hosted by the Governor General throughout the year ahead.

Following the announcement of McNeill's appointment, the Etobicoke Yacht Club shared their excitement at the news.

"A member of EYC since 1988, Irene is a sailor, racer, mentor, and trailblazer," they said. "She is Canada's first and only female International Race Officer (IRO)—a high-pressure, high-profile role that demands exceptional leadership, judgment, and resilience. At a time when the sport was overwhelmingly male-dominated, Irene

persevered, led with confidence, and helped redefine what leadership on the water looks like."

"Beyond officiating at grassroots and elite international events, Irene has been a powerful advocate for inclusion in sailing. She co-founded LEAP-Sailing, a program dedicated to encouraging girls' participation in the sport, and continues to mentor women into race management and leadership roles."

"Her Order of Canada is not only well deserved, but a reminder of the lasting impact one passionate, determined sailor can have. Fair winds, Irene, and thank you for everything you've given to EYC and beyond."

## Turner is Southlake's first baby born in 2026

### Service Ontario set to move this month

BY BROCK WEIR  
EDITOR  
LOCAL JOURNALISM  
INITIATIVE REPORTER

It was a busy New Year at Southlake Health as the community hospital welcomed seven new babies on January 1, 2026 – but leading the charge was six-pound seven-ounce Turner.

Turner arrived 48 minutes into the New Year.

"It's a joy to welcome the first babies of 2026 at Southlake Health," said Nicole Vernon, a Registered Nurse on the Birthing Unit at Southlake Health. "Congratulations to all the new parents and babies! Our team is thrilled to be part of their story and support them as they begin the New Year with a new chapter."

Shortly before parents were ready to welcome their 2026 babies, the Ontario Government reflected back on the babies born the previous year with the top 10 baby names for boys and girls in Ontario through 2024.

The name Olivia was the number-one girls' name for the 16th year running, while Noah topped the list of boys' names for the sixth consecutive year, according to the Ministry of Public and Business Services Delivery and Procurement.

Rounding out the Top 10 list for girls were Charlotte, Sophia, Amelia,

Emma, Ava, Maya, Sofia, Mia and Isla, while the Top 10 list for boys is completed by Liam, Theodore, Oliver, Jack, Henry, Benjamin, Lucas, Muhammad, and Leo.

"Welcoming a new baby and choosing a name are joyful milestones and we want parents to spend that time making memories and not worrying about the paperwork," said Service Ontario Minister Stephen Crawford in a statement. "Service Ontario's 5-in-1 Newborn Bundle makes life easier for Ontario parents, saving them time so they can cherish those first precious moments, while registering their newborn and applying for essential documents from the comfort of their home."

### SERVICE ONTARIO ON THE MOVE

Aurora's long-standing Service Ontario location on Wellington Street East at Mary Street will close at the end of the day on January 13 ahead of its grand-opening the following morning at its new location in Aurora's northeast.

Service Ontario will open its new doors at 35 Sunday Drive in the southwest quadrant of Wellington and Highway 404.

35 Sunday Drive is located just off Goulding Avenue.



Turner was the first baby born at Southlake Health in 2026.

Photo courtesy of Southlake Health

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## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Thanks for supporting  
Empty Bowls: Pine Tree  
Potters Guild

On behalf of the Pine Tree Potters' Guild (PTPG), I would like to express our gratitude to everyone who supported our 16th Annual Empty Bowls Fundraiser at Newmarket's Old Town Hall.

Empty Bowls events are held by potters in communities throughout North America to raise funds and awareness for local charities that work to relieve hunger and homelessness within their community.

The two local charities Pine Tree Potters' Guild Empty Bowls fundraiser supports are Welcoming Arms, Aurora, and Inn From the Cold, Newmarket. For 2025, we are thrilled to report that our event raised \$28,500. Therefore, Welcoming Arms, Aurora & Inn from the Cold, Newmarket, have each received \$14,250.

For our core fundraising event, we hosted a bowls with lunch and dinner (seating 120 each time) on Thursday, November 20, and then sold bowls on Friday and Saturday in our designated bowl room, as part of our guild's annual Holiday Sale. It was amazing to see how many people from our community came out to purchase bowls from our designated bowls room, in fact, we sold so many that we could not open that room on the Sunday! Thank you!

During the lunch and dinner events, patrons choose a soup bowl from the hundreds on display in our bowls room. Pine Tree Potters work all year to create approximately 600 bowls, which are all donated so patrons entering our bowls room are captivated by the sheer artistry. After selecting a bowl, they proceed to our dining auditorium where local culinary establishments are ready to serve a ladle of their signature gourmet soups and artisan breads, all donated as well. After guests enjoy multiple dishes of these delicious soups, they take their selected handmade bowl home to serve as a gentle reminder that not everyone has a full bowl every day.

We are so grateful to the following culinary partners who donated gourmet soup and bread for our meal event:

Catharina's Kitchen	Orchid Thai Cuisine
Dorio's Kettleby	Piazza Italian Eatery
Italian Bakery	Poached Dreams
Hungry Brew Hops	Diner
Hurst Bakery	Ristorante Orsini
Inn From The Cold	Romy's Restaurant
Joa on Main	and Lounge
Luna Ristorante	State & Main
Ma's Best	Sweet Dutchess
Marche Marie	Kitchen and Café

We extend a heartfelt thank you to Meridian Credit Union for a very generous grant and support in selling tickets ahead of the event. Thank you to the staff at Newmarket's Old Town Hall for their assistance to ensure our event went off without a hitch. Thank you to Joy Gannicott and Anthony Kubelka, the pianists who played beautiful music while patrons enjoyed their soups.

Thank you to our sponsors, Tucker's Pottery Supplies for donating the clay used by our potters crafting the bowls, to David Schembri Design for his artistry and to Allegra Print Aurora for donating our printed materials.

Thank you to our dedicated volunteers who donated their time and skills to ensure the success of our event. Finally, thank you to the members of our communities who continue to purchase tickets and bowls, enabling our guild to raise these much-needed funds for Inn from the Cold and Welcoming Arms.

Stay tuned into Pine Tree Potters' Guild Instagram, Facebook, and Website for information on 2026's Empty Bowls event and sales, which will again be at Newmarket's Old Town Hall. We always have a small Empty Bowls table on our sale floor too where potters donate various types of work and all the money raised goes to our fundraiser too. We look forward to seeing you there!

Lisa-Marie Oiphant  
Chair, Empty Bowls Fundraiser  
Pine Tree Potters' Guild

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## Machell's Corners



## Full speed ahead in 2026

The New Year didn't waste any time getting into full swing.

Many of us had to shake off a bit of snow – well, more than a bit, depending on where you are – to get back into the office on Monday morning and, again, depending on your level of post-holiday Zen, could have been a bit more of a challenge than you would like on your first day back to the office or school.

After a few days off, it's nice to slip back into the routine rather than get thrust back into it, but we don't necessarily write the rules.

After what was, for many, a fraught 2025 on so many fronts – economically, politically, spiritually – I know there was a lot of hope in the air that some of this would ease over the next twelve months and we would be able to collectively look ahead to brighter horizons.

Those hopes were dashed relatively early on when the world was thrown into significant uncertainty following events in Venezuela, as conflict still rages in Ukraine, despite multiple perspectives on how peace can be achieved, as many parts of the Middle East remain nothing short of a tinderbox, and, here at home, the affordability crisis continues with little abatement.

With so many issues facing our world at the dawn of a new year, it was somewhat disconcerting by comparison to have what was possibly our quietest start to the New Year in recent memory.

Typically, I like to start the year off on the right foot by spending the evening, or the first few hours of the fresh calendar, doing something new. It doesn't have to be big – it could be something as grand as a trip within Canada or abroad, or as quiet as raising a drink with friends and family.

This year, however, the only new things that were enjoyed were two movies we had never seen before on New Year's Eve, and the creation of a new cocktail, given the eclectic mix of bottles we received over the season of giving. It had been a pretty intense and busy period leading up to the holiday, so we didn't feel any guilt spending it a bit quietly and while it was quiet indeed, it was time well spent.

There is something to be said about finding peace amid the quiet every once in a while.

As a budding journalist, one of my most formative experiences was time spent working overseas. Access to the internet in this location was, at the time, a bit spotty, and calls home exorbitantly expensive, so before setting



## BROCK'S BANTER

Brock Weir

off one of the factors that made me feel a bit uneasy was being disconnected for extended periods of time.

Was it a fear of not being in touch?

A matter of potentially missing an important event with the power to change the world until hours after the fact?

A bit of both?

Maybe.

Looking back, despite being a man who depends on news, matters of public interest, and all the wonderful things that fall under the umbrella of "human interest," it seems so silly to feel that way. Yes, the world is more connected now than ever before, so those fears of the early 2000s are now basically moot, but having that time away from a cord, device, or, in short, a screen, was a veritable luxury in hindsight.

As I wrote in my last column before the holidays, one oasis of calm we traditionally find as a family is the King's Christmas Message, as it often serves as a great way to set the tone for the year ahead.

I couldn't help but smile this Christmas Morning, however, when the King's words touched upon just that – finding that calm, that peace, wherever you can.

"Pilgrimage is a word less used today, but it has particular significance for our modern world, especially at Christmas," said the King. "It's about journeying forward into the future while also journeying back to remember the past and learn from its lessons. We did this during the summer, as we celebrated the 80th anniversaries of VE and VJ Day. The end of the Second World War is now remembered by fewer and fewer of us as the years pass, but the courage and sacrifice of our servicemen and women, and the way communities came together in the face of such great challenge carry a

timeless message for us all. These are values which have shaped our country and the Commonwealth. As we hear of division, both at home and abroad, they are values of which we must never lose sight.

"As our world seems to spin ever faster, our journey may pause to quieten our minds, in T.S. Eliot's words, at the point of the turning world, and allow ourselves to renew. In this, with the great diversity of our communities, we can find the strength to ensure that right triumphs over wrong. It seems to me that we need to cherish the values of compassion and reconciliation, the way our Lord lived and died.

"These stories of the triumph of courage over adversity give me hope, from our venerable military veterans to selfless humanitarian workers in this century's most dangerous conflict zones, to the ways in which individuals and communities display spontaneous bravery, instinctively placing themselves in harm's way to defend others. As I meet people of different faiths, I find it enormously encouraging to hear how much we have in common, a shared longing for peace and a deep respect for all life.

"If we can find time in our journey through life to think on these virtues, we can all make the future more hopeful.... That prayer for peace and reconciliation, for doing to others as we would have them do to us, which rang out over the fields near Bethlehem more than 2,000 years ago, still reverberates from there and around the world today. It's a prayer for our times, and our communities too, as we journey through our lives."

A pause does more than just quiet our minds. It can help each of us restore the mental bandwidth that we have to take on all the challenges that lie ahead with renewed vigour, determination, and perhaps even a clearer view of what ultimately lies at the finish line.

It affords us inner peace where external peace might be harder and harder to come by these days. Perhaps if we all take the time to find it, we can collectively harness it for the greater good.

We certainly need it this week and, if it's needed that much in the just the first full week of the year, we're going to need more and more time for these restorative pauses.

In the meantime, welcome 2026, and all the challenges – and joys – that you have in store for us!

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## THE AURORA MUSEUM & ARCHIVES is...

# Perched on the Edge!

We all need a little assistance, now and then. In the 18th century, clever contraptions were devised to assist women with the ever-present task of hand-sewing. This Sewing Clamp (W60) would affix to the edge of a table and provide a spring-loaded clip to hold the material being stitched. They were almost exclusively made in this shape and therefore are properly called "Sewing Birds". This early mass-produced example (1850s) is rather plain and made of iron, whereas later birds were brass and adorned with velvet pincushions or pin-sharpening emery bulbs. For a time, they were popular pre-wedding gifts to a woman from her future groom. Thanks for the helping hand, er, beak?

New Year's celebrations rang joyously throughout our communities. As the clock struck 12:00am on January 1, I reflected on all that was in 2025, and I was overwhelmed with emotion with what can be accomplished in 2026. This year, I invite every Canadian to make a choice: to choose hope. Hope in the belief that, together, we can confront the challenges we face, and build a future that is stronger, safer, and more secure. It is the conviction that through hard work and responsible leadership, families can regain confidence in their everyday lives.

Across our community, I hear the same concerns again and again. Families are feeling the strain of rising costs, grocery bills are higher than ever, and many are worried about how to make ends meet. These pressures are not abstract—they affect real households every day. Mark Carney himself said Canadians should judge his government by the cost at the grocery store. The verdict is clear: food prices rose 4.7 per cent year over year in November, the largest increase in nearly a year. Nearly 2.2 million Canadians, including more than 700,000 children, relied on food banks monthly last year. A typical family of four will spend \$17,571 on groceries in 2026, almost \$1,000 more than the year before. Everyday essentials like milk, bread, eggs, fresh produce, even holiday treats, have grown significantly more expensive.

These costs are not inevitable. Canadian food inflation continues to rise at more than twice the rate in the United States. Additional taxes and regulations, from the Liberal industrial carbon tax to charges on food packaging and fuel, add to the

It's time to look back on the past year in Aurora.

### January

Niagara College announces that its New Year's resolution is to vacate the Armoury this year.

### February

The negative effect of tariffs being levied out of the blue on Canadian goods sees one bright side, as folks double down on supporting our country's economy and shopping locally.

### March

The proposed sites for the soon to be relocated Southlake hospital are so much further north they prompt the suggestion that when it moves the facility should be renamed "Northlake".

### April

The new gym opens at SARC, encouraging even more residents to be active, but not too active, as showers were cut from the original design to save costs.

Much of the waste picked up during the annual community cleanup consists of election signs from the recently completed provincial and federal campaigns.

### May

Residents are encouraged to appreciate our local wildlife while they can after pet goldfish join phragmites, red-eared sliders and other invasive species already firmly established in, and pushing the native species out of, our local ponds.

Based on its proximity to the railway crossing, consideration is given to naming



## COSTAS' CORNER

MP Costas Menegakis  
Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill

burden for families. Conservatives have been clear: strong take-home pay, lower taxes, and responsible fiscal management are essential to help Canadians afford what they need. Eliminating these unnecessary taxes that add costs, supports households, empowers farmers and producers, and ensures that every family can put food on the table without compromise.

Affordability is only part of the Canadian promise. Families also want to feel safe, and Canadians want a country that can stand confidently on the world stage. Concerns about legislation affecting freedom of expression, economic stability, and Canada's strength abroad are legitimate. A nation built on freedom, fairness, and opportunity must respond to these concerns with integrity and clarity.

Instead of limiting job opportunities, with unreasonable and unsustainable immigration policies, the government must invest in the next generation. Youth unemployment in the Greater Toronto Area is hovering close to 20%. Focusing on youth employment is essential for

building a stable and prosperous society. Young people represent the future workforce, innovators, and leaders, yet unemployment limits their potential and confidence. Without access to jobs, youths may face poverty, poor mental health, and social exclusion. High youth unemployment also slows economic growth and increases dependency on governments. By investing in education, skills training, and job creation, societies can empower young people to contribute productively. Addressing youth unemployment reduces crime, promotes social stability, and ensures sustainable development. Prioritizing youth employment today secures economic and social progress for future generations.

Even in difficult times, I am hopeful because I see the strength of Canadians every day. Neighbours help neighbours, communities pull together, and families persevere with courage and generosity. Hope is strengthened when we see that solutions exist, that our hard work is respected, and that the future can be brighter.

As your Member of Parliament, I am proud to work alongside Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre to advance policies that restore affordability, protect freedom, and strengthen our communities.

The challenges before us are real, but so too is our capacity to overcome them. I will continue to fight for our community. In this new year, let us choose hope. Let us believe that paycheques can go further, communities can be safer, and Canadian families can look forward to a future of opportunity, security, and dignity. Together, by choosing hope, we can make that future a reality.



## INSIDE AURORA

Scott Johnston

## Year in Review 2025

the new residential development going in at Industrial and Wellington "Train Whistle Terrace".

### June

0% is both the proposed Aurora tax hike for 2026 and the chance that it will actually happen.

### July

With the introduction of the new library kiosk at SARC, kids complain that parents in the stands are now reading instead of watching their hockey games.

### August

Little-used and rusty door hinges across Town require oiling when Doors Open returns to Aurora after an absence of several years.

### September

Following separate studies within a few months of waste collection, parking and Yonge Street streetscaping, the Town commissions a study of its use of studies.

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### Influenza reminders from York Region's Medical Officer of Health

As York Region's Medical Officer of Health (MOH), and as a parent of younger kids, I am deeply saddened by the tragic loss of three children in the Ottawa area. My heart goes out to the families and communities affected.

We all want to keep children safe and healthy—especially now, as cold weather, holiday gatherings and indoor sports and activities bring us closer together in enclosed spaces.

Influenza, or the flu, is circulating in our community at record levels—the highest we've seen since the COVID-19 pandemic. While we may see the majority of influenza cases now and early in the new year, it is important to remember that the flu season doesn't end after winter holidays—it often lasts into spring.

While, fortunately, there have been no influenza-related deaths reported in York Region at this time, local hospitalization rates have been high and continue to rise. Influenza can cause severe illness, especially in young children and older adults, and can lead to hospital stays.

Right now, children under the age of 19 are the most impacted by influenza. This is why it's so important for families to get vaccinated if they haven't already. The flu shot is safe, effective and remains our best defense against severe illness and hospitalization. Yes, there is a new strain of flu circulating this year. The good news is, this year's flu shot provides cross-protection against the new strain and reduces your and your loved one's risk of being hospitalized for the flu.

I want to remind our community that everyone six months of age and older is strongly encouraged to get the flu shot if they haven't already. It takes about two weeks for the vaccine to provide full protection, so getting vaccinated as soon as possible is important. Flu shots are free and available at participating pharmacies, as well as through family doctors, nurse practitioners and walk-in clinics. Call ahead to confirm availability and whether you need an appointment.

Layering up the flu shot with other simple habits like staying home when you're sick, regularly washing your hands, covering coughs and sneezes, and cleaning high-touch surfaces can make a big difference in preventing the spread of the flu and other seasonal viruses. When combined, these steps help keep us healthy and minimize disruptions to work, school and our plans.

Dr. Fareen Karachiwalla  
York Region's Medical Officer of Health



## GETTING THINGS DONE

Mayor  
Tom Mrakas

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Receiving their 2025 Youth Volunteer Awards from Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo were, from left, Angela Fang, Hailey Graham, and Naya Mueller.

Auroran photos by Glenn Rodger

## Youth honoured for volunteer work engaging community

BY BROCK WEIR  
EDITOR  
LOCAL JOURNALISM  
INITIATIVE REPORTER

A triple dose of youth excellence was in the spotlight in 2025 when the Aurora came together for the Community Recognition Awards where, for the first time, the Youth Volunteer Award was shared by three local high school graduates.

Aurora's Youth Volunteer Award is presented each year to a young citizen for their volunteer efforts and for making a "significant contribution to the community by demonstrating what it means to be a positive leader."

These are characteristics embodied by Angela Fang, who was the first of the trio to be recognized.

"Angela has made a significant impact on the Aurora Cultural Centre through her dedicated involvement

over the past three years," said Mayor Tom Mrakas, reading her citation. "As a youth member of the Outreach Committee, she has provided invaluable insights that have shaped youth engagement strategies and the successful Youth Artists on the Rise program.

"Angela doesn't show up; she steps up, demonstrating that age is not a barrier to making an impact. Her leadership and commitment have fostered a vibrant and inclusive environment for young artists in our community."

Reflecting on the honour, Fang said she was "thankful" for the recognition and the opportunity to give back.

"I'm so thankful to be a part of the Aurora Cultural Centre for the last four years and to be a part of a

community that prioritizes art and prioritizes making art accessible within Aurora," she said. "I have also been able to witness the growth of the Committee and the arts and culture in Aurora from the Committee still being in Town Hall to the reopening of the Cultural Centre within Town Square."

"I want to thank the Aurora Cultural Centre for giving me this opportunity and thank everyone here who has supported the Cultural Centre within their journey of growth and development. I hope you continue looking...forward to the new endeavours that are coming up as well."

Hailey Graham was the second youth volunteer to be recognized for their contributions to Aurora.

"Throughout her high school journey, Hailey has demonstrated exceptional leadership and a deep commitment to creating inclusive communities, from organizing impactful school-wide events, to contributing to the York Region District School Board's mental health initiatives and supporting global causes. Her passion for making a difference is evident," Mayor Mrakas continued. "Hailey's passion ignites possibility in others, empowering fellow youth to use their voices, take action, and shape the future of their community."

"She's driven by purpose and not driven by recognition, but by a desire to make things better, kinder, and more connected for everyone around her. Hailey's dedication to uplifting others and fostering a sense of belonging has positively impacted countless individuals."

Reflecting on why she gives back, Hailey said it was all about making people feel like they're included.

"I do what I do to build community and to make every person feel like

they have a place in every space they enter," she said. "I believe it is incredibly important to feel like you belong and that you have a cheerleading squad of people that are supporting you and cheering for your success."

The third student, Naya Mueller, was recognized for her wide-ranging contributions to the community, despite only moving to the community a short time before.

"Naya has become an incredibly engaged and impactful youth volunteer," said Mayor Mrakas. "Naya's contributions have rippled outward toward touching lives and reminding us that youth leadership isn't the future – it's here now."

"Her leadership style has been a force for good, turning compassion into action and transforming ordinary moments into meaningful change. Her involvement spans mentorship, student government, arts, environmental initiatives, community safety programs, and the Town's Youth Engagement Committee. Naya's diverse contributions and her passion for creating a welcoming and inclusive community make her an exemplary young leader."

In turn, Naya said she was "deeply honoured" to be acknowledged for her contributions.

"This award truly is a testament to my efforts ensuring that other youth can also hold this Town in the same high regard that I do," she said. "Serving as one of the co-presidents of the Youth Engagement Committee and being part of several councils at my school is my way of giving back to the community that enriched my upbringing. I hope to inspire other teens to initiate the change that they wish to see in the Town and also meet the amazing residents that live here in Aurora."



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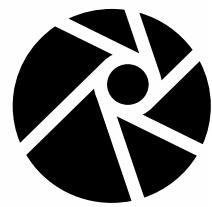
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# BUSINESS & FINANCE



## Community Reflection Space could dramatically change entrance to Town Hall

BY BROCK WEIR  
EDITOR  
LOCAL JOURNALISM  
INITIATIVE REPORTER

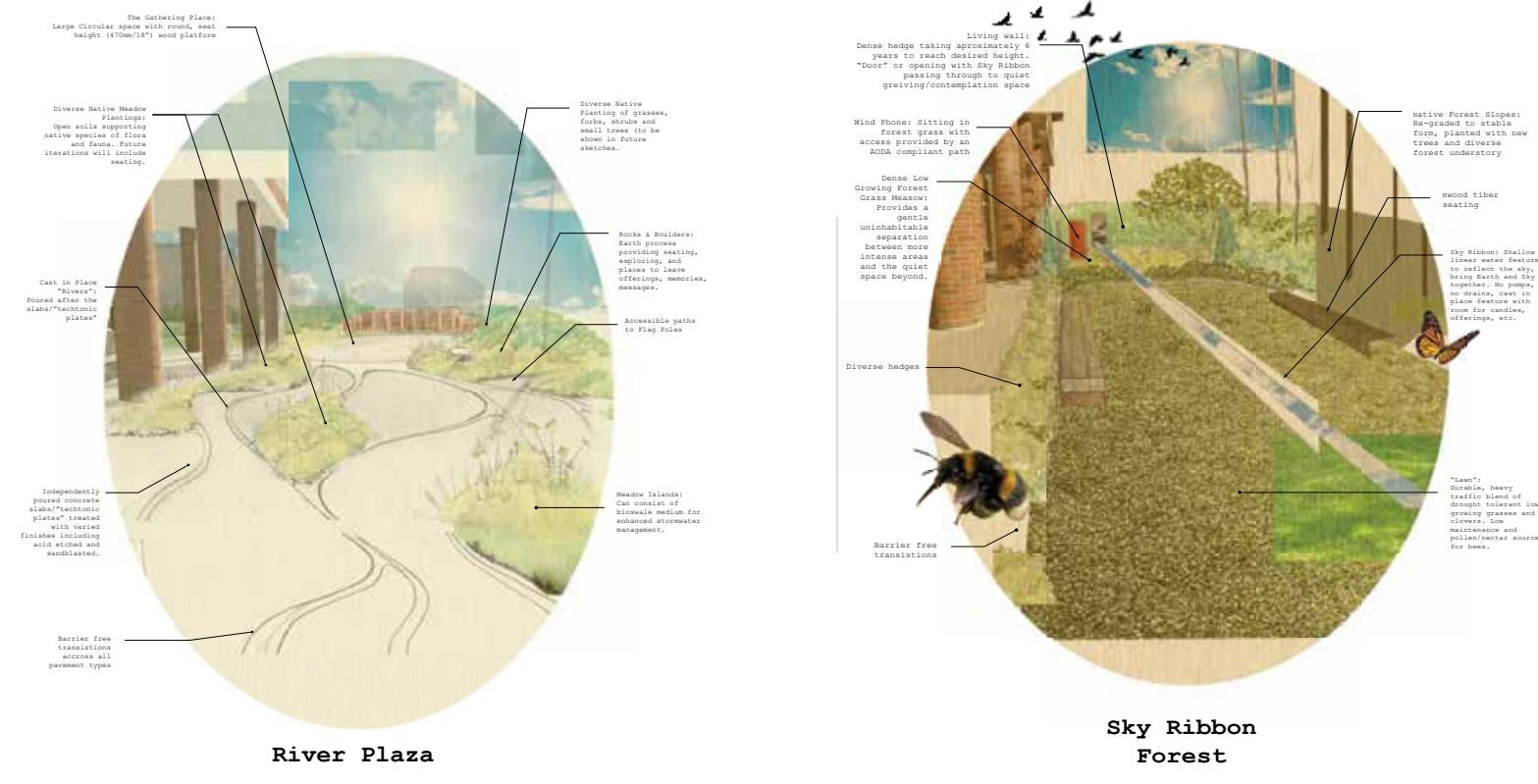
Aurora's Community Reflection Space, a new place for residents to gather in times of reflection and grief, could see Town Hall get a dramatic outdoor transformation.

Plans for the Community Reflection Space continue to take shape, with Aurora's Accessibility Advisory Committee having the chance to look over concepts and make comments just before the New Year.

The latest plans show a significant overhaul of the front entrance of Town Hall, directly across from the Aurora Seniors' Centre.

Now dominated by an evergreen tree that is not in the best of health, the plans show the tree removed and replaced with a raised platform for gathering, and the forecourt of Town Hall converted to a series of pathways – symbolic “rivers” featuring diverse plantings and terrains.

The eastern section of the Town Hall outdoor space will also be transformed, with hedges, a regrading of the adjacent hillside with new trees and forest plans,



**Sky Ribbon Forest**

Illustrations courtesy of the Town of Aurora

timber seating, and a “sky ribbon,” which is described as a “shallow linear water feature to reflect the sky, bring Earth and Sky together,” all with no pumps, no drains, and offering a space for community members to leave candles.

This initiative, developed through extensive public and stakeholder consultation, aims

to provide a dedicated area for residents to gather in times of collective grief and reflection,” said Michelle Johnson, Exhibition and Collections Coordinator for the Town of Aurora, in a report to the Committee. “Town Hall was selected for its accessibility, quiet setting, and alignment with the space’s intended purpose, avoiding recreational conflicts associated with community parks. The approved location reflects community feedback emphasizing the need for a respectful, inclusive, and peaceful environment. Staff are presenting a thirty-percent design proposal that sets the foundation for a space that is peaceful, culturally sensitive, and welcoming to all.

“[The design] proposal introduces key elements that support the space’s mandate, including thoughtfully secluded layout within the Town Hall footprint, accessible pathways, and elements that encourage quiet reflection. The proposed design fosters a respectful environment that accommodates diverse expressions of grief, while maintaining a clear distinction from spaces typically associated with protest or political activity.

“As the Town’s municipal headquarters, Town Hall offers both visibility and symbolic alignment with civic values, reinforcing Aurora’s commitment to compassion and community wellbeing. It’s public nature, however, requires a sensitive design approach to ensure the space remains emotionally safe and clearly non-political. The current proposal thoughtfully balances these considerations, and further refinements will be made as the project progresses towards final design and approval.”

Further details were provided at the Committee level by landscape architect Adam Norford, and while members raised question about the accessibility of pathways, snow storage, and clear signage, feedback was largely positive.

Norfod told the Committee the designs thus far had been informed not just by Committee feedback, but also through consultation with Indigenous leaders, York Regional Police, Oasis Bereavement Group, and other stakeholders.

Given the current footprint of the space and what’s proposed, he estimated that the Community Reflection Space could accommodate 450 people under the existing covered outdoor space.

“[Town Hall] is a nice piece of architecture; it’s well-designed, it’s well-built, and in the early morning or late in the day, the bricks just light up with the sun – they glow. But the landscape surrounding it almost seemed like an afterthought. It didn’t carry on that same level of thoughtfulness that the building did,” he said.

“The other thing, too, was the importance for a contemplation space, or even this being a valuable kind of pocket park or a place for people to spill out after events, we really wanted to bring more nature into the site, and especially from the Indigenous perspective, these non-human beings of our community. This allowed us to bring that even closer to the building.”

The plan, as it stands now, received a ringing endorsement at the Accessibility Advisory Committee by Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner, who said it was “the best presentation I’ve ever heard” in her 22 years on Council.



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# Hillary House National Historic Site aims to welcome 1,400 visitors this year

BY BROCK WEIR  
EDITOR  
LOCAL JOURNALISM  
INITIATIVE REPORTER

From international visitors to movie shoots, 2025 was a banner year for the Aurora Historical Society and its Hillary House National Historic Site.

Now that the new year is under way, the Society is aiming to welcome more than 1,400 visitors to the site in 2026 to enjoy more than 25 programs, special events, and two exhibitions.

This was the vision outlined to Council this past fall by the Society as local lawmakers considered the 2026 Budget.

Looking back on 2025, the Society noted they completed the transfer of the Godfrey Collection, an expansive library of medical books, to the Archives of Ontario, a project supported by the Town, and increased their fundraising in a number of ways, including charitable gaming in Richmond Hill and in Newmarket.

"We have seen increased tour visitation this past summer, back up sometimes higher than pre-COVID numbers, so that is really exciting for us," said AHS curator and manager Kathleen Vahey. "We educated community members through outreach through nine programs — that's 662 people.

"Although we saw a decrease in the number of programs offered because of staff resources, we refocused our efforts on the most impactful events. The number of people we welcomed into Hillary House has actually increased when compared to last year. While the number of people reached via outreach has slightly decreased due to participating in fewer opportunities, we still believe that 600 people for a staff of one-

and-a-half is still pretty good!"

A consistently positive trend, Vahey added, is in volunteerism with hundreds of hours of volunteer time given to the Society.

"As a small volunteer-led non-profit charitable organization with big aspirations, we continue to face ongoing challenges," Vahey continued. "This includes enhancing our fundraising revenue, increasing volunteer engagement, assessing the critical maintenance and needs of this 160-year-old Hillary House in a timely fashion and securing stable funding that will ensure we can tackle the more complicated and multi-phased restoration projects successfully."

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Former Aurora mayor Geoffrey Dawe, who serves as Co-President of the Aurora Historical Society, noted that from a "straight dollars and cents" perspective, volunteers contributed the equivalent of "well over \$20,000 if you went just on the basic minimum wage."

"That's a monetary value, but the real value of volunteers...is simply the fact we could not do what we do without our volunteers. We're extremely grateful for all the volunteers who come up and help us do all sorts of things, whether it is helping with teas or raking leaves," said Dawe.

"Our 2026 goals, we're looking at 25 programs and special events. We wish to present two exhibitions,

*We're extremely grateful  
for all the volunteers  
who come up and help us  
do all sorts of things,  
whether it is helping with  
teas or raking leaves*

we're shooting for over 2,000 hours in volunteer opportunities, we're looking at welcoming 1,400 visitors to Hillary House, and we hope to do Doors Open again [which was] a big bonus to us."

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# Arts & Culture

## Revolution Now aims to “Rise Together” to support youth making social change

Celebration to be held Friday at Royal Rose Gallery

BY BROCK WEIR  
EDITOR  
LOCAL JOURNALISM  
INITIATIVE REPORTER

As 2SLGBTQ+ see their lives becoming increasingly politicized, a local group is striving to create platforms “where they can be celebrated and loved.”

Revolution Now was founded four years ago by local teacher Megan Glanfield with an aim to create visibility, opportunity and community for marginalized and racialized people and, since its inception, has raised tens of thousands of dollars to support youth through scholarships and donations to non-profits.

This Friday, January 9, their work – along with works of the individuals they have supported – will be in the spotlight as Revolution Now partners with Royal Rose Gallery to host Rise Together. Running from 6 – 9 p.m., the event will showcase work of scholarship winners Justin Gray, Ava Dedier, Alyssa Morgan, and Michael Freitas, and raise much-needed funds for their 2026 scholarship program.

“Revolution Now started four years ago as a social enterprise that was built out of a response to homophobia and transphobia in public schools,” says Glanfield, noting she witnessed this firsthand as a teacher. “Since then, we’ve generated over \$32,000 for marginalized youth, either through scholarships or through non-profits that we’ve donated to, [focusing] on Black, Indigenous, and 2SLGBTQ+ youth and artists who support those communities.”

“I think we live in a time where people feel they don’t have agency. I think we often



Revolution Now staff are pictured at the York Pride Festival.

Contributed photo

turn on the news and we’re discouraged and disheartened by the time and the news around us, and I think Revolution Now is the counterbalance to that. Our organization reminds people that we have agency all the time, and that we can develop and envision the world that we want to be a part of. Through the arts and

learning about people from different life experiences than maybe our own, we can share in creating something that’s really beautiful that envisions something better.”

This is shaping up to be an exciting year for Revolution Now as they pivot away from their origins as a social enterprise to a non-profit model that will help them rise to the next level.

As they work towards that long-held goal, Friday’s event will be a celebration of the journey thus far and the individuals helped along the way.

“I’m super-excited about this event and it’s something we haven’t done this way before – it’s a showcase of our first four years and the people who are in it,” says Glanfield, turning her attention to the youth. “I think the world needs to see their work, needs to see their message, needs to see their vision of what the world can be. Justin Gray has been amazing and with our organization for a long time, and was one of the winners of our Black Excellence Scholarships. Now he’s a student at OCAD University and is an amazing artist who is going to take the world by storm. He’s one of those people where, if you go to the event, you’re going to say, ‘I knew him before he was big.’”

Dedier, another winner of the Black Excellence Scholarship, has just started a non-profit of her own, while Freitas, a member of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, is a visual artist, fashion designer, and author who has served as Poet Laureate

for the Rainbow Awards, a key initiative spearheaded by Revolution Now.

“We’re really excited about our fourth-annual Rainbow Awards and we’re very thankful to the York Regional Police and the York Region Catholic teachers who have traditionally funded scholarships with us,” says Glanfield. “The Rainbow Awards are a celebration of 2SLGBTQ+ youth and I think in a time where – and I am going to use the word ‘queer’ as an umbrella term that represents all those letters in the alphabet – at a time where queer youth are often having their lives politicized, what we’re doing is the opposite. We’re creating platforms where they can be celebrated and loved, and encouraged to be exactly who they are, where they are right now.”

“I think when we start talking about creating the world we want through the arts, it’s done one small step at a time. We’re a very grassroots organization that’s just starting to grow and we appreciate all the people of Newmarket and Aurora who have helped us start, who believed in us and believed in what we were talking about: that the world can be better and can be better through community, visibility and opportunity. The more we get to know each other, the better we can make the world around us.”

For more information on Revolution Now, including tickets to the January 9 event, visit [revolution-now.ca](http://revolution-now.ca).

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# Aurora set for musical revival as Winter Blues Festival returns to community



Auroran photo by Brock Weir

From page 1

grew significantly since the Macdonalds founded it as a live music party in their own home. It was soon too big for one home to handle and branched out to various venues in the community for both key concerts and pop-ups, including Theatre Aurora and St. Andrew's College.

Pop-ups associated with Aurora Winter Blues Festival also took place within the Aurora Cultural Centre's historic Church Street School, and now that the school is at the heart of Aurora Town Square, the new edition of the Festival will be something of a homecoming.

Opening the lineup on Thursday, February 26 will be Jack De Keyzer, who will take over the Aurora Town Square Performance Hall at 7.30 p.m. The music continues the following evening, also at 7.30 p.m., with Suzie Vinnick, featuring special guests Kevin Breit, Tony D., and Jay Blues.

Glenn Marais' Jook is up next on Saturday, February 28, at 1 p.m., followed by Dominique Fils-Aime

that evening at 7.30 p.m., and on Sunday, March 1 with Harrison Kennedy and Dave Mowat at 2 p.m., concluding with Little Magic Sam Band at 7.30 p.m.

"When Greg and Stewart gave me the green light, we began putting things in place for the four days that are running, replicating as much as we could [of the original Aurora Winter Blues Festival] under this roof – and it's a brand-new roof," says Derek Andrews, Performing Arts Producer for the Aurora Cultural Centre.

Andrews is no stranger to Blues. A long-time producer at Toronto's Harbourfront Centre, he was also tapped to emcee a few Aurora Winter Blues Festival shows over the years, having first taken in the Festival first when it was still a house party.

"I think Blues music is accessible – people have heard the Blues whether you know it or not," says Andrews. "When you hear Etta James on the soundtrack of a movie, it's not necessarily telling you it's Etta James, but there she is, leaving her imprint. Blues is the bedrock

of rock, jazz, and country, and it's highly influential to a lot of other styles of music."

The program, he adds, is all-Canadian with most of the performers hailing from Ontario.

"I think the lineup is excellent," says Smith. "Having some local artists as well as people from across Ontario, it's a really strong lineup and it's going to be a very busy four days here at the Centre. It's great to see that the Aurora Winter Blues Festival will be revived. York Region has a really strong Blues patronage and a lot of people from all over the GTA have come to the Aurora Winter Blues Festival in the past, so I think we're going to look forward to many of those same people, if not more, coming again."

Adds McLaren: "Treat it as a night out and maybe discover something new, rediscover something from the past, and enjoy the programming because there's a lot of effort and some great talent."

For more information on the 2026 Aurora Winter Blues Festival, visit [auroraculturalcentre.ca/awbf2026](http://auroraculturalcentre.ca/awbf2026).

Education workshops will continue legacy of Aurora Winter Blues Festival

BY BROCK WEIR  
EDITOR  
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

When Music Aurora decided to take the Aurora Winter Blues Festival to the next level, they did so with the community in mind, supporting up-and-coming artists and furthering their opportunities.

This legacy will continue on as the Aurora Cultural Centre takes over the Aurora Winter Blues Festival next month with a series of workshops beginning on Friday, February 27, with Early Instruments of Blues at 5 p.m.

"Glenn Marais is joined by Manny DeGrandis (Toronto Blues Society) cigar box, dobro, diddleybow, broom, stomp board, and harmonica are all featured in [Marais'] Jook' project and explained in this session," says the Cultural Centre.

The second workshop will take place the following morning, Saturday, February 28, at 11 a.m. with String Bending.

"Rewinding from their main concert, this guitar workshop features ten-time Maple Blues Award winner Suzie Vinnick, Ottawa's Tony D (Monkey Junk) with upstart rising star Jay Blues."

Strings remain in the spotlight on Saturday, February 28, with Banjo Man Blues.

"Discover the history of Black settlement in York Region with a public interview by Aurora Museum's Michelle Johnson and award-winning Underground Railroad historian and musician David Braithwaite."

The series concludes Sunday, March 1 at 4 p.m. with Blues Harp.

"Cabbagetown Steve' Grant, harmonica master from Little Magic Sam's band, joins Alderville First Nations bluesman Dave Mowat in a session guided by local Aurora singer and emcee Steve Falk."

All sessions are located in Brevik Hall, within the Aurora Town Square

Continued on page 19



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# Shadowpath recognized for bringing arts, culture to unexpected locations

BY BROCK WEIR  
EDITOR  
LOCAL JOURNALISM  
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Beauty can be found all around us, and sometimes even in the most unexpected of places—but sometimes it also needs a creative eye to foster

beauty in some unexpected locations. Such is the work of Aurora's Shadowpath Theatre Productions, which was honoured by the Town of Aurora with its 2025 Arts & Culture Award.

Part of the Town's Community Recognition Awards program, the



Shadowpath's Jackie Lazar accepts the 2025 Arts & Culture Award from Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland.

Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger

## YCDSB calls for nominations of outstanding alumni

Contributed by  
York Catholic District School Board

York Catholic District School Board alumni are truly outstanding. Through their God-given talents and social conscience, they constantly make the world a better place.

York Catholic recognizes some of its incredible alumni every year with the Distinguished Alumni Awards. This is a celebration of Catholic education and the people who have benefited from it.

If you know a York Catholic alumni who deserves the Distinguished Alumni Award, nominate them by Sunday, January 11, 2026 through the webform linked here: [www.ycdsb.ca/nominate-someone-special-for-the-ycdsb-distinguished-alumni-award](http://www.ycdsb.ca/nominate-someone-special-for-the-ycdsb-distinguished-alumni-award).

Last year's Distinguished Alumni winners were:

- David Coletto is the CEO and founding partner of Abacus Data, a leading market research and strategy firm, and he is the host of the InFocus podcast;
- Sgt. Julian Alexander Doria is a section commander, parachute company, in The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada Airborne Infantry, Canadian Armed Forces;
- Nathan Gaba is an advocate for the Black community, a

public speaker, a consultant and an ableism disruptor who was born with cerebral palsy;

- Stephen Pastore is a research fellow in the Department of Genetics at SickKids Hospital and an adjunct professor at York University and Humber Polytechnic;
- Cloey Uddenberg is a professional soccer player for AFC Toronto in the Northern Super League.

Distinguished Alumni Awards winners:

- Have made a significant contribution to their field, industry and/or community, and are an inspiration to others (and have worked in their field for at least two years)
- Reflect one or more of the Catholic School Graduate Expectations
- Demonstrate creative and critical thinking skills and integrate Catholic values into their daily lives, as a socially responsible global citizen
- Graduated from a York Catholic secondary school or spent the majority of their formative years in a York Catholic school

Please nominate the exceptional York Catholic alumnus in your life by Sunday, January 11, 2026.

award is bestowed each year to an individual or organization that has fostered arts and culture within the community – and sometimes also beyond Aurora.

"Shadowpath Theatre has enriched Aurora's cultural scene by creating unique site-specific performances in unexpected locations, from heritage homes, parks, and cafes," reads their citation. "They have brought arts to the community and to life. They have a long history of partnering with local venues and artists, making theatre accessible and engaging for diverse audiences.

"Shadowpath is also a strong supporter of the local arts economy and champions female leadership within the industry. The impact of their innovative approach

to storytelling and community engagement has been felt throughout Aurora."

The Arts and Culture Award was accepted by Jackie Lazar, Shadowpath's Board Chair.

"We're super grateful and honored that the Town of Aurora has supported us and recognized our work with this award," she said. "The arts are such a vital part of communities. They enrich the lives of citizens that live there. They turn everyday spaces into places of creativity, learning, and inspiration. They connect neighbors, and so, it's really important that we continue to have groups like Shadowpath provide arts to communities such as Aurora."

"We're really grateful for this honor."

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# Stormwater ponds are not for recreation: Conservation Authority



CONTRIBUTED

The Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority is reminding residents not to use neighbourhood stormwater ponds for recreation activities.

While your local stormwater pond may look like a great place to have a game of pick-up hockey or a leisurely skate, don't be fooled. These ponds have a specific job, and that's to continuously collect stormwater runoff from neighbourhoods.

Because of this function, they are designed to have water flowing in and out of them all year long (from rainfall and snowmelt), making them an unsafe place to play.

No matter how deep into the winter or how thick the ice may appear, temperature changes can cause major variations in ice thickness. Air pockets are also easily formed under the surface and contaminants like salt weaken the ice. All these factors combined, create dangerous and unpredictable conditions that put your safety at risk.

Despite these hazards, you can still enjoy the outdoors this time of the year. At conservation areas and municipal parks, official trails have been created with your safety in mind. Use these trails and still get some fresh air safely.

Be safe by following these tips:

- Stay on the official trails at Ontario's conservation areas;
- Keep family members and pets away from riverbanks and edges of all water bodies;
- Do not attempt to drive or walk on iced-covered water bodies. Always obey any posted safety signs;
- Avoid all recreational activities in or around water, especially near ice jams or ice-covered water bodies, unless at an officially designated municipal facility;
- Never use stormwater ponds for ice skating or any other activity.



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WEEK OF JANUARY 8, 2026

## Junior Tigers tally four goals in final frame to down Wellington Dukes 5-3



Christian Colosimo (73) and Matthew Humphries (32) defend against the Wellington Dukes on Saturday night at the ACC. Humphries made 38 saves to backstop the Tigers to a 5 – 3 win.

BY JIM STEWART

Newly-acquired Johnathan Cirone scored two goals in the third period to lead the Aurora Tigers to a 5-3 win over the Wellington Dukes on Saturday night – much to the delight of an animated crowd at the ACC.

Cirone's short-handed goal 7:34 into the final frame catalyzed his club's comeback victory.

The fast-skating forward cut in from the right wing and beat Dukes' goaltender Colby Booth-Housego high glove side from inside the faceoff circle to stake Aurora to a 3-2 lead.

The resident of Barrie credited his shortie to the skill of Tigers' top scorer Cayden Smith—who earned three assists versus the Dukes – and the vocal encouragement of veteran defenseman Avery Grant.

"Smitty gave me a great pass. Granter [Avery Grant] had told me to get there. The crowd was loud after the goal and it gave the team energy."

Cirone's first goal as a Tiger since being acquired in mid-December from the Pickering Panthers revved up the lively fans who were treated to an entertaining OJHL game.

His second goal in an Aurora uniform came with 34.6 seconds left in the game when Cirone retrieved a fortuitous bounce off the neutral zone boards on a clearing pass from Grant, got behind the Wellington defense corps, and slid the puck into the empty Dukes' cage.

Cirone—who accrued 16 points in 27 games with the Panthers—had an oracular moment on the bench before he took to the ice to fend off Wellington's 6-on-5

Auroran photo by Jim Stewart

advantage: "I was telling the boys that the empty net goal was going to happen. I feel like a fortune teller now. I was in the right place at the right time."

Cirone's sense of good timing was reflective of the club's best home ice effort of the season. Trailing 2-1 heading into the final frame, Aurora got the equalizer at 6:19 when Flint Firebird forward Charlie Hotles notched his seventh goal as a Tiger—set up by Smith and Anris Bundzeneks. After the hard-working Bundzeneks missed a wide open net by inches seconds earlier, the big power forward secured the puck in his own end on the ensuing rush and hit Smith on the tape.

The high-scoring Assistant Captain set up Hotles speeding down the right wing. Hotles fired a howitzer from just inside the right faceoff circle beating Booth-Housego cleanly and bulging the twine to tie the game 2-2.

Seventy-five seconds later, Cirone sniped his shortie from almost the same spot as Hotles to give the home side its first lead of the game. However, Zachary Carrier's wrist shot from the left point at 8:38 sailed past Tigers' netminder Matthew Humphries who was screened on the play. Carrier's 22nd of the season tied the game 3-3.

After the tying goal by the Dukes, the Tigers showed much resilience as well as a deft scoring touch in their first game of 2026. Less than two minutes after Carrier's tying goal, Jamie Buscarini's breakout pass was cradled on the blade by Thomas Leone who fired the puck from a bad angle below the goal line that found just enough space short side to beat a surprised Booth-Housego. Leone's dramatic game-winner restored Aurora's lead to 4-3.

None of the goal-scoring heroics by Hotles, Cirone, or Leone would have led to Saturday's satisfying outcome if not for the 38 saves made by Humphries.

The Aurora goaltender was especially spectacular in the final minutes of the third period—making two goalmouth saves to rob the visitors. Humphries sealed the five-hole with 58.4 seconds left to preserve the home side's precarious lead with the Dukes pouring it on with their net empty and an extra skater unleashed in the Tigers' zone.

After Humphries foiled another point blank shot by the Dukes and smothered

the rebound, the visitors called a timeout with 29.0 seconds left. Grant's clearing pass came off the penalty box boards at a crazy angle and on to Cirone's tape who slid the puck into the empty cage. It felt like the roof shuddered a bit at the ACC due to the crowd's raucous celebration.

Cirone praised Humphries's game-saving performance: "He was crazy tonight. He's such a great goalie in this league and he's so far above this level for his age. He shows up for us every night. It was great we got some goals tonight to support

Continued on page 23



### AURORA SPORTS HALL of FAME

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#### DE JEMBE MCBEAN

ÉCOLE SECONDAIRE CATHOLIQUE RENAISSANCE

Djembe "DJ" McBean is a Grade 9 student at École secondaire catholique Renaissance (ESC Renaissance) who is quickly making a name for himself as a committed student-athlete and positive presence within his school community. With a strong balance of academics, athletics, and leadership, DJ approaches every opportunity with hard work, enthusiasm, and a desire to improve.

DJ is a member of the Phénix junior boys' basketball and junior boys' volleyball teams, with basketball standing out as his favourite sport. He has been playing the sport since Grade 6 and continues to develop his game through both school and club competition. In addition to representing ESC Renaissance, DJ plays basketball for the IEM Spartans, a house league based in Newmarket, where he competes against high-level opposition and sharpens his skills year-round.

On the basketball court, DJ is known as a dependable leader and a strong defensive player. As an effective ball distributor, he demonstrates strong court vision and an unselfish approach, consistently putting his teammates in positions to succeed. His game reflects a mature understanding of teamwork and responsibility.

School coach Zachari Deschatelets speaks highly of DJ's dedication to academics and his passion for sport, noting his winning attitude and constant pursuit of improvement. Whether in practice or competition, DJ brings energy, focus, and coachability, earning the respect of coaches and teammates alike.

Outside of team sports, DJ contributes at the school by helping run intramural volleyball activities, showing initiative and a willingness to support fellow students. He admires the play of longtime NBA point guards Kyle Lowry and Stephen Curry. Outside of athletics, DJ enjoys listening to music by Drake and has already begun considering a possible future career in engineering.

With his work ethic, leadership, and well-rounded character, Djembe McBean has a promising path ahead both on and off the court.

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# “Big Goal” Van Berkell notches 30th of the season in Junior Panthers’ 4-1 win over Waterloo

BY JIM STEWART

Annabella Van Berkell scored two goals and Catelyn Clark and Ellie Lewington added one each in the Junior Panthers’ tidy 4-1 win over the Ravens in Waterloo on Sunday afternoon.

Central York opened the 2026 portion of its schedule with a spirited comeback win on the road featuring four unanswered goals. The victory in Waterloo improved the fifth-place club’s record to 22-6-1-2 in the OWHA’s 25-team Elite Division.

Five minutes into the first period, the home side opened the scoring when Emma McCoubrey beat Panthers’ netminder Jamie Sanford to stake Waterloo to an early 1-0 lead. However, the steady Sanford shut the door the rest of the way—turning aside 19 of the 20 shots she faced-- to enable her team’s comeback.

Van Berkell cued the comeback with her first goal of the game four minutes into the second period. The Panthers’ leading scorer was set up by Abby Pak and Lily Paisley. Pak’s 14th assist of the season helped pull Central York even at 1-1.

With 2:05 remaining in

the middle frame, the Junior Panthers took the lead when “Big Goal” Van Berkell’s unassisted marker beat Ravens’ goaltender Danica Averill. The speedy centre’s game-winning goal was her 30th of the season. Van Berkell’s milestone marker moved her into second in the U22 Elite Division’s goal-scoring race. She trails frontrunner Madeline McCullough of the Etobicoke Dolphins by only three. Van Berkell also holds down tenth place in the OWHA scoring race with 39 points in 28 games.

After Van Berkell’s scoring heroics in the second period, a pair of timely goals in the final frame sealed the road victory for Central York.

Catelyn Clark’s power play goal seven minutes into the third period—set up by Paisley’s second assist of the game—staked the visitors to a 3-1 lead.

Ellie Lewington’s unassisted empty netter with 2:16 left in the game provided the three-goal margin of victory in Waterloo.

In a game featuring playoff-seeding implications, the fifth-place Panthers will host the third-place Mississauga Hurricanes on Wednesday, January 7. Puck drop at SARC is 7 p.m.

## Outdoor patio for mental health inpatients opening in spring 2026

New space one of many recent refurbishments improving patient experience at Southlake

CONTRIBUTED

Southlake Health is creating an elevated outdoor patio space for patients receiving inpatient mental health care at the Davis Drive site, offering a safe and healing outdoor environment specially-designed to support adult patient’s well-being.

Located on the third floor of Southlake’s West Building, the new 2,900-square-foot seasonal patio will include a variety of seating areas for reflection and connection, as well as planters filled with seasonal plants and flowers to bring natural elements to the space.

The space offers a primarily southern exposure, providing natural light and open views through glass partitions that maintain safety precautions.

“Access to outdoor space is an important part of a healing experience,” said Mahdi Memarpour MD, Chief of Psychiatry and Nathan Robinson, Director for Capital Development at Southlake. “This new patio will give our patients the opportunity to step outside in a safe and therapeutic setting, supporting their recovery and overall mental wellness.”

Construction coordination is already underway, with on-site work beginning this month thanks to the communities’ generosity.

Donors to Southlake Health Foundation’s Better.Begins.Today. Mental Health Campaign thoughtfully invested over \$7.5-million to support a

variety of expansions and upgrades to transform Southlake’s Mental Health Program, including the addition of this patio space.

“We are deeply grateful to our donors and community for helping make this vision a reality,” said Jennifer Ritter, President and CEO, Southlake Health Foundation. “Their generosity ensures that patients in our Mental Health Program have access to the same kind of healing spaces that benefit so many others across the hospital.”

The new space reflects Southlake’s ongoing commitment to advancing mental health care and creating supportive environments that optimize patient and visitor experiences, including:

- An expanded Emergency Department that opened in January 2025, creating an additional 2,400 square feet of space to meet the communities’ growing needs;
- A new artificial intelligence (AI) enabled MRI introduced in May 2025 to transform diagnostic imaging capacity;
- A new Starbucks, Tim Hortons, retail and patient food services opened over the past two years as part of a complete culinary transformation project, and much more.

This work is reflective of Southlake’s evolving capital redevelopment plan, which will maintain acute care capacity at the Davis Drive site.

While contractual approvals are ongoing to secure land on which to build a second acute care hospital, refurbishments to the Davis Drive site will continue as Southlake works to transform into a Distributed Health Network over the next 10 years.



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# Lindsay extends King's winless streak to seven with 5-1 win at Zancor

BY JIM STEWART

Kaden Koutroulides fired two goals and George Cote turned aside 34 of 35 shots to lead the Lindsay Muskies to a 5-1 win over the slumping King Junior A Rebellion on Sunday afternoon at the Zancor Centre.

Koutroulides credited Cote's stellar play for his club's big road win.

"He's an unbelievable goalie for us. Best pickup we made as a team this year. It's on us that he didn't get the shutout. He made big saves for us all game."

Rebellion forward Max Anderson foiled Cote's shutout attempt with 2:09 left in the game. Anderson's 12th of the season--set up by team assist leader Ryan Fairbairn (24) and pugnacious defender Matthew Anderson -- provided one ray of light in another dismal home ice performance by the Rebellion.

Sixty-eight seconds after Anderson's marker made it 4-1, the lights were turned out on King when Koutroulides finished off his three-point game by setting up Braxton Myers and restoring Lindsay's four-goal lead.

In addition to earning the primary assist on his team's final goal of the game, Koutroulides scored what turned out to be the game-winner at 12:39 of the first period when he fired a wrist shot from the right faceoff circle.

King's agile netminder Noah Mavin got a piece of the puck, but it ricocheted off his blocker, landed inside the right post, and fell into the cage to give Lindsay a 2-0 lead. The congenial Koutroulides was impressed by his marksmanship against one of the best goaltenders in the OJHL.

"It had to be well-placed. I tried to shoot it over his pad and blocker in the open space stick side. I was off-balance and didn't see it go in. I

realized I scored when my teammates were rushing at me."

Even more impressive was Koutroulides's second goal of the game -- best described as a "Savardian Spin-o-Rama" and a laser snap shot between the circles that beat Mavin with 5:26 left in the second period.

The smooth-skating centre described the broken play that created his scoring opportunity.

"The puck bounced off my teammate's head and right on to my tape. I spun in the slot, saw a small space, and shot it bar down."

Koutroulides's deft scoring touch gave the Muskies a commanding 3-0 lead heading into the second intermission. In addition to the Lindsay centre's creative offensive contributions, the Rebellion's undisciplined play gave the visitors countless scoring opportunities on the power play.

King was forced to defend four 5-on-3 shorthanded situations as the Sunday matinee featured a parade to the penalty box by Rebellion combatants. Mavin was his team's best penalty killer -- piling up dozens of sensational saves to keep the score respectable.

In a game with playoff implications for both teams, Koutroulides discussed the significance of his club's road win.

"We broke a five-game losing streak with our win today. We've been playing tough teams like Trenton, but we're going to have to keep getting points. We play a physical, hard-hitting game and today we were finishing our checks from the start of the game to the end of the game. We have to get going and play games like this to make the playoffs."

With their win at the Zancor Centre, the feisty Muskies solidified their hold on eighth place in the OJHL East playoff race by moving nine points ahead of ninth-place Aurora. The Tigers, after upsetting Wellington 5-3 on Saturday

night, dropped a 3-1 matinee matchup in Markham earlier on Sunday.

The Rebellion's winless streak reached seven games with Sunday's home ice loss to Lindsay. Seventh-place King (19-15-1-0) last victory was a 3-2 decision in Niagara Falls on November 28. Despite the month-long slump, King's Junior A squad remains one point ahead of the eighth-place Mississauga Chargers with three games in hand and five points ahead

of the 9th-place Caledon Admirals with one game in hand in the race for the last two playoff spots in the OJHL West.

King will look to get back into the win column on Friday, January 9 by hosting the twelfth-place Georgetown Raiders. Puck drop will be 7:30 p.m. After hosting the last-place Raiders, King will welcome the first-place Toronto Patriots to the Zancor Centre on Sunday, January 11 at 3 p.m.



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## Family First Night brings crowds to Aurora Town Square

Aurorans gathered to bid 2025 farewell and welcome 2026 in style as the Town of Aurora hosted its annual New Year's Eve event at Aurora Town Square. The event featured something for everyone and took full advantage of Town Square's outdoor and indoor amenities. (Top Row) Mayor Tom Mrakas and Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese get the party started by cutting the New Year's cake. Jenny, Wilson, Richard, Charles, and Wesley gather for live entertainment in Brevik Hall. (Second Row) The "2026" balloons were a popular photo op, as enjoyed by Liam, Mike, Katherine, and Chloe. As was the "2026" ice sculpture, enjoyed by Nidhi, Bhauin, Aria, and Ahika. (Third Row) Activities included skating on the outdoor rink, with Sophia, Olivia, and Mary Anne; and face painting inside, where Penelope patiently waited for the art to unfold. (Fourth Row and Right) Magic shows and demonstrations kept all ages engaged, and bonfires all ages cozy, including Maggie and Sonya.

Auroran photos by Glenn Rodger

# Sharp honoured for volunteer work for seniors, youth

BY BRIAN WEIR  
EDITOR  
LOCAL JOURNALISM  
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Whether it's through his advocacy work for youth as a member of the Optimist Club of Aurora, or as president of the Aurora Seniors' Association, the work of Aurora's Glen Sharp is wide-reaching – and was recognized by the Town of Aurora this past year with the 2025 Older Adult Volunteer Award.

The Older Adult Volunteer Award is presented annually to an Aurora resident aged 55 or older who "through their volunteer efforts has made a significant contribution to the community and has demonstrated their commitment to being a positive leader today and into the future."

"Glen is a cornerstone of the Aurora Seniors' Association where he serves as President and an enthusiastic

advocate for older adults," reads his citation. "His leadership on various committees encourages engagement and forward-thinking initiatives which benefit seniors in our community; and Glen's dedication expands beyond the Seniors' Centre through his long-standing involvement with the Aurora Optimist Club...and Aurora Minor Hockey Association to name just a few.

"And he inspires others to get involved and give back." Sharp described volunteerism as a win-win for all.

"I'm thrilled and honoured to be receiving this award," he said. "Volunteering gives me an opportunity to meet and work with many wonderful people. If I can help them out in some way and make their day a little better, in turn, it makes my day a little better. For me, volunteering is a win-win proposition."



Glen Sharp accepted the 2025 Older Adult Volunteer Award from Ward 6 Councillor Harold Kim.

Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger



## Senior Scape

BY CHRISTINA DOYLE

*No pessimist ever discovered the secrets of the stars, or sailed to an uncharted land, or opened a new heaven to the human spirit.*

—Helen Keller

This is the New Year Week, a beautiful fresh start! This is the beginning of realizing that optimism can be learned. I sincerely care about my readers and pray that your 2026 will be a turning point for you in a most profound way. We are moving forward, friends. With that in mind I offer you simply love.

Try this the next time you go out, smile at everyone you meet. Expect something good to happen to you no matter what has happened yesterday. You are not going to be the prisoner of your past because this year will be an incredibly inspiring one for you. Have hope, not wishful thinking, living a purposeful life.

Practice gratitude and please surround yourself with positive people. Go ahead and reflect only on your past accomplishments and limit exposure to negative news. Engage in mindful meditation to calm your soul and do not be afraid of the quiet. Optimism isn't just being happy all the time. Optimism means being hopeful and seeing tough times as temporary situations that can be fixed, endured and even learned.

People who are optimistic enjoy life more, and there are numerous studies that show being optimistic can help you overcome both physical and mental ailments. Not too long ago, we all experienced the pandemic, and we all had to stay home. Either your viewpoint was that "I feel like a prisoner in my own home" or it gave you the extra time to work on a hobby or begin a new one.

We are creatures of habit in the sense that we wish to control our daily lives as much as possible. However,

we must know that there are things we can't control, and sometimes bad things happen. Well, that is just part of life, but what we do have is how we react to them. We can change our own thoughts and behavior which is empowering and freeing. I know it isn't easy but what other choice do we have? Do we dwell in the negativity, the worry and the stress on our heart and mind?

To live fearlessly is to see the beauty in every little thing, to be always grateful, and to always believe that it's possible. You will feel yourself energized and begin managing your stress with relaxation. Go easy on yourself, forgive yourself when you make a mistake, and learn from it. Surround yourself with things that make you happy and please practice kindness and gratitude. Speaking from experience, it can be easy to surrender to an emotional depression when adversity strikes. Yes, it's easy to be pessimistic about tomorrow when today may seem so bleak. It is time to put those thoughts of lack behind us. It is time to make changes, and those changes don't happen overnight, but they are the beginning to a truly peaceful and happy life.

So, dear readers, for this glorious 2026 New Year realize that the past is the past and it can only continue to hurt you if you hold on to it. Let it go, there is whole new life out there waiting for you to discover. Your moments of happiness are about to begin, embrace this year with renewed hope and make your life simpler and keep your heart open.

God bless you all and a Very Happy New Year to all.

### ASA memberships are now up for renewal

Memberships officially expired on December 31. The cost of renewal is unchanged: \$35 for Aurora members and \$50 for everyone else. What great value for social interactions, programs, activities, and events. If not already a member, join now to get the most out of your membership!

### Friday Night Dances at the Seniors' Centre!

Our upcoming Friday dances in February will be held on February 6

and 20. Each evening begins with a line dance lesson at 6:45 p.m., followed by ballroom dancing at 7:30 p.m., along with a few additional line dances throughout the night. Admission: \$5 for members • \$7 for non-members. Music by DJ Les. Don't miss joining as a New Year's resolution!

For more information on the Aurora Seniors' Centre and all it has to offer,

drop by 90 John West Way, visit the web site [www.auroraseniors.ca](http://www.auroraseniors.ca), or call 905-726-4767 between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. Monday to Friday. The monthly Seniors Association bulletin is posted on our web site so for all the details on Association activities, clubs, events, bistro lunches, sports, and movies to mention a few, and town programs, trips and other valuable information concerning the Aurora Seniors Association, take a look at [www.auroraseniors.ca](http://www.auroraseniors.ca)!



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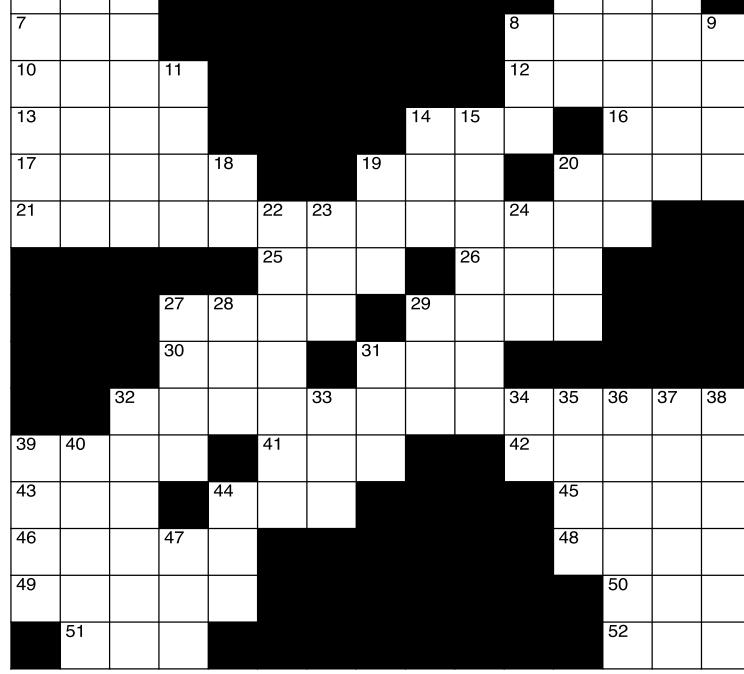
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# CROSSWORD

Puzzle No.TAJAN826 • Solution in Classifieds



### CLUES ACROSS

- Former CIA
- Language
- Constrictor snake
- Demand
- Rich man
- Short-tailed marten
- Zoroastrian concept of holy fire
- Superconducting super collider
- International group of countries within the Americas
- Sacred state for Muslims
- Shock therapy
- Engrave
- Localities
- Paddle
- Periodical
- Dishonestly gained money
- Gain possession of

### CLUES DOWN

- Acquire
- Console
- Hunting expedition
- Pie mode
- Simple shoes for peasants
- Eurasian shrub
- Reciprocal of a sine
- Work together in harmony
- Grenade
- File extension
- Minute pores in a plant
- Medal of Honor
- Make a mistake
- Advance slowly, as if by inches
- Sandwich meat
- An awkward stupid person
- Former measure of length
- CNN's founder
- Witness



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# THINGS... you ought to know

## SATURDAY, JANUARY 10

The Town of Aurora will host its Mayor & Council New Year's Levee today from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. at Aurora Town Square. Levees date back prior to the 17th Century and are still a celebrated tradition today in a variety of formats. The traditional and historical purpose of a Levee was for the leaders (Kings or Queens of the time) to address their nation, providing a positive outlook at the year ahead. Today's Levees are held in the form of an open house. Traditionally the Lieutenant Governor's Levee is held in the morning, whereas a Mayor's Levee in the afternoon. The intent of this tradition is to show the government's commitment to providing the best service for the community with a note of good cheer either on January 1, or on any day during the month of January. For a full schedule of events at Town Square, visit [aurora.ca/levee](http://aurora.ca/levee).

## SATURDAY, JANUARY 24

The White Heather Pipes and Drums invites you to attend their Robbie Burns Night, an evening of bagpipes, Scottish music and dancing. Enjoy a delicious meal of roast beef and Yorkshire pudding. Cocktails at 5 p.m., dinner at 6 p.m. Royal Canadian Legion, 105 Industrial Parkway North. Tickets are \$70.

and are available at the Legion or from band members. We hope you will join us for a great night of entertainment and fun.

## SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 14

Kick off Family Day weekend at Aurora Town Square this morning as the Town of Aurora hosts the first of its two-part Arctic Adventure celebration. The fun runs today from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. with a variety of family-friendly activities. For more information, visit [aurora.ca/arcticadventure](http://aurora.ca/arcticadventure).

## MONDAY, FEBRUARY 16

Arctic Adventure returns to Aurora Town Park today from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., with a whole host of winter fun for Family Day. For more information, visit [aurora.ca/arcticadventure](http://aurora.ca/arcticadventure).

## ONGOING

Partage le Francais: Ce groupe accueille les ADULTES / 18+ (des francophones aux débuteants 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](http://meetup.com/Partagez-le-francais). For more information, visit [www.meetup.com/partagez-le-francais](http://www.meetup.com/partagez-le-francais).

\*\*\*

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](http://AbuseHurts.ca) to select your drop off time slot.

him."

Cirone noted that the same effort on Saturday night would be required in Markham on Sunday afternoon: "We have to bring the same energy. We have to hit anything that moves and take the play to them."

Unfortunately, the Tigers couldn't establish a two-game winning streak to usher in the New Year. Philip Govedaris fired a hat trick to lead Markham to a narrow 3-1 win over Aurora at Centennial Arena.

Govedaris's goals in the first and third period staked the Royals to a 2-0 lead, but Aurora forward Paul Mazanik narrowed the Tigers' deficit to one goal with 2:56 left on the clock. Hotles earned his 10th assist of the season on Mazanik's marker.

With Humphries pulled for the extra attacker, Govedaris completed his hat trick by slipping the puck into the empty net with 54 seconds left in the game.

The Tigers will try to carry their positive momentum into a four-game road trip with visits to Trenton on Tuesday, Lindsay on Friday, North York on Sunday, and Haliburton next Friday.

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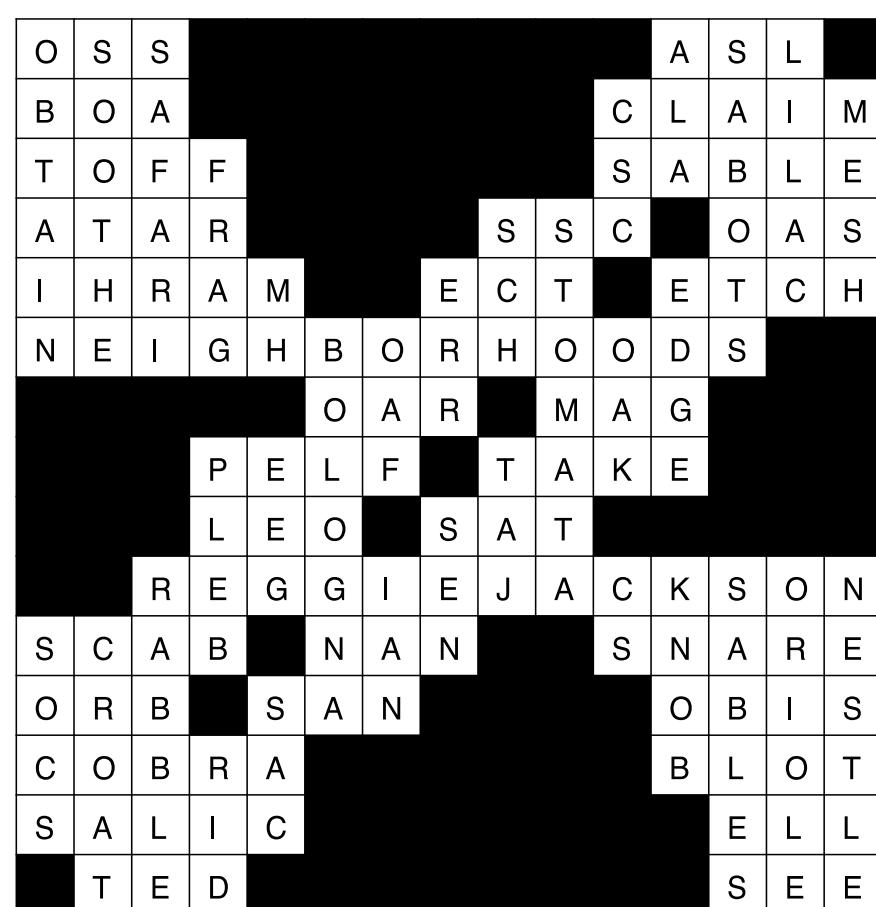
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