

Fond memories will endure following Hoedown

As the impossible-to-miss white tent went up on the lawns of Magna International each summer, it was a sure sign that September was coming and, with it, an extravaganza of music, giving and memory-making.

Those memories will endure as Magna's Hoedown evolves from an in-person event to a fund supporting local charities.

'We heard from people who would say, 'as soon as I see the tent go up, I know that summer is coming to an end,' just like people say when the CNE opens,' recalls Steve Hinder, who was, until his retirement, a key Hoedown organizer. 'I think the piece I will miss the most is the community spirit that happened during Hoedown, how everybody got engaged and without all those components coming together and working together, Hoedown would never have happened. It's so unique that way and I don't know if it could be replicated ever again. Although I absolutely accept and understand why it has come to an end, I am disappointed that it has come to an end because of what it did for community.'

From its roots as a backyard barbeque, to a one-night-only musical extravaganza, in recent years the Hoedown grew to a two-day affair, kicking off with a special Hoedown event for York Region students with special needs, allowing youth to experience the fun in a way tailored to their enjoyment, and enjoy performances from finalists in the Hoedown Showdown, an Ontario-wide talent contest to find Canada's next country music star.

These additional components grew by leaps and bounds every year and was, for the students, something to look forward to at the beginning of each school year.

'It was a ton of work, but boy it was satisfying when you saw the faces on those kids on Friday and the people winning the talent contest, and people having a great time on Saturday night,' says Hinder. 'I will definitely miss that but I think it is fabulous that Magna continues to set a standard for community-supported giving. You don't have to look very far in this community to realize what a difference Magna has made in the community and I would wonder where we would be without those years of support from Magna. What I would like to do is have a Hoedown Generation 2 that is back to the grassroots of Hoedown, showcasing local talent, again with local charities benefiting.'

Taking on the organization in recent years was Erin Cerenzia, Manager of Community Relations for Magna International.

'I have personally been involved in the Hoedown for over 20 years - starting as a volunteer at the age of eight when my swim club was selected as a Hoedown beneficiary and evolving over time in my role to Chair of the Committee,' she said. 'I think for me, rather than a favourite memory, something that I will always remember is the feeling of inspiration that Hoedown always gave me. It was, and continues to be, incredibly inspiring to work for a company that is focused on supporting the charities who are integral to the communities in which we operate. This spirit of generosity is core to who Magna is as a company, it makes me incredibly proud to come to work each day, and it is the legacy of the Hoedown that continues through our new partnership and the Magna Community Fund.'

'We've been lucky at Magna to have great employees and volunteers involved in the Hoedown throughout its long history. While there are always challenges when you're organizing an event of this size, our team always remained focused on the end goal - supporting our community - which makes it all worth it!'

By Brock Weir
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