

Ground officially broken on Holiday Inn Express & Suites



By Brock Weir

They may have wanted to seek shelter inside after huddling under a tent in the grey, fall chill on Wednesday afternoon, but Aurora's newest hotel won't be ready to welcome guests until early 2020.

Business representatives and dignitaries gathered on Eric T. Smith Way last week to formally break ground on Holiday Inn Express & Suites, the second of two hotel constructions now underway in Aurora.

Once complete, the six-storey hotel will boast 110 rooms, 11 of which will be accessible, along with 14 extra large king suites. Amenities will include an indoor pool, board room, meeting rooms, a fitness centre, and two outdoor patios.

"We hope to be up and running in twelve to 13 months from now," Aldo Gottardo, President of property owner Gottardo Group of Companies, which is also developing an adjacent property for an office building, told *The Auroran*. "Aurora is really a fledgling area with a lot of new development.

"We have always wanted to be here [and] we have a lot of major clients here. Our whole thing is development and we saw an opportunity coming in here. We bought a nice site [near Highway 404] which I think started us off well. We want to be a resident here. We have never been here before building for ourselves, we have built for others, but this is a good opportunity to plant our roots here. Holiday Inn is obviously a great opportunity to start."

The Holiday Inn Express & Suites Development is a development in conjunction with InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG). On hand for Wednesday's ground-breaking was IGH's Stuart Laurie who said the company operates 5,500 hotels around the world with 800,000 groups. 185 properties in their portfolio are in Canada, representing 25,000 rooms.

"This is not just another dot on the map," said Mr. Laurie, addressing the Gottardo Group. "We are honoured and excited to be your partner. You are the sponsors that are accepting the risk and you will be living the Holiday Inn Express brand every day. Congratulations and we look forward to the next one."

Representatives from the Gottardo Group on hand for the ceremony paid tribute to the outgoing Council, including former mayor Geoff Dawe, as well as the Town of Aurora's Economic Development Office, for helping make the Holiday Inn development a reality.

Addressing Mayor Tom Mrakas, who formally received the Chain of Office less than 24 hours before, they said he hoped he would "continue to grow [the business community on Aurora's east side] more."

"This is a very exciting opportunity," said Mayor Mrakas. "It is an exciting opportunity due to the fact we're looking at becoming a premiere destination when it comes to sports tourism and this allows us to provide the opportunity [for people] to have a place to stay within our town. That is a very exciting opportunity for us and we're looking forward to not only the business and sports community, but for everyone to come here and learn and see the uniqueness of our town and be able to stay here within our town, shop, and create more business."

Added Gottardo's Peter Duma: "Let's hope we get a lot of the soccer and hockey teams and everything else on the weekends" and hope they don't beat up the hotel too bad!?"