

Growing Together: the Bank of Montreal & Aurora



By Brock Weir

As Aurora celebrates its 150th anniversary, The Auroran begins a new series on some of the long-standing Aurora businesses that have served generations. This week: The Bank of Montreal at Yonge Street and Wellington Street.

Few businesses in Aurora, if any, can boast they have served the same community on the very same corner for almost as long as the Town has existed. But, Aurora's first Bank of Montreal location is no ordinary bank.

Founded at the corner of Yonge and Wellington in 1888, their services have been a permanent feature on one of Machell's original corners.

"I think it is the community focus," says Branch Manager Geoff Moore of why his BMO location has flourished along with the Town around it. "We work very hard at hiring the right people so that when we have customer interaction, every interaction will be positive and professional. Longevity becomes really important.

"Whether it is the Bank Manager or the customer service representative who is greeting the customers when they are doing a deposit or withdrawal, people like to see the same face" especially if it is the same face who has been here long enough that you can greet them by name and ask about the kids because everyone knows each other. It is professionalism plus one."

BMO was established in Aurora on January 18, 1888. While the Town is celebrating its 150 years since Machell's Corners was established as the Village of Aurora, it wasn't established as a Town until less than 30 days before the bank opened up its doors.

It was not the first bank on the site, as a bank was established within the general store that had previously been on the corner, but after incarnations as the Federal Bank, and later the Ontario Bank, a series of mergers led to the Bank of Montreal we know today.

This first building was replaced with a new, modern brick structure in 1922 in a model almost identical to the BMO branch currently at the corner of Main Street and Timothy Street in Newmarket. This distinctive building was eventually replaced by the current dark brick, single storey structure in the mid-1970s.

Mr. Moore is on his second tour of duty at the bank, after first starting there in personal lending in 1982. Even in that short window of time, relatively speaking as far as this branch is concerned, the changes are evident.

"We have had the luxury of having staff that is typical of a small town where staff are working at the branch for 10, 15, or 20 years," he says. "At our anniversary this year, we had some staff attending, retirees, who were here that long in just this one branch. That is typical of small-town Ontario. You can't call Aurora small-town Ontario anymore but back in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s it certainly was.

?Some staff have been dealing here in lending capacities for so long that they have dealt with parents, and as the children of those parents started to grow up, it was dealing with them with student loans and personal mortgages, and that is a 20 year family scenario.?

Since that time though, as families have grown and the Town has evolved, so too have the expectations of what people expect from their bank. A large majority of people, he says, rarely venture beyond the bank machines unless they are coming in to replace their debit cards or to handle things like mortgages and student loans. The people that regularly come in are the ones who always have, and likely will be the ones who always will.

Next up for the bank is a little bit of a facelift. Originally slated for full renovations this year, that was put on the backburner until the start of the 2014 fiscal year which, for BMO, starts this November.