

Hall of Fame seeks alternate support after Council bails

By Brock Weir



Mayor Geoffrey Dawe tees off at the Mayor's Charity Golf Classic in East Gwillimbury last week. With proceeds going to local charities and non-profits, one of this year's beneficiaries will be the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame. (Auroran photo by David Falconer)The show must go on for the Aurora Hall of Fame Induction dinner.

Committee members behind the November dinner set to honour the inaugural inductees for the Hall of Fame are looking for additional support after Council denied a \$3,000 sponsorship package for the event.

‘The ultimate goal we have is to put a high quality event on and we are going to do that and we’re committed to doing that regardless,’ says Ron Weese, Director of Sport Aurora, a leading force behind the development of the Sport Hall of Fame.

A particularly ‘timely’ boost came at the end of the week with the Sport Hall of Fame among the several community groups sharing the proceeds of the Aurora Mayor's Charity Golf Classic on Thursday. The group will receive \$5,000 from the tourney to help develop the initiative.

Councillors were poised to endorse \$3,000 sponsorship for the Induction Dinner going into last Tuesday's Council meeting, but things hit a snag when a possible ‘conflict’ was highlighted by Councillor John Gallo.

Harking back to lingering uncertainty over whether Council members would be allowed to sit on the board of the Aurora Cultural Centre while steering clear of potential conflicts of interest, Councillor Gallo questioned whether it would be a similar scenario for Councillor John Abel, who sits as a voting member for the Aurora Sport Hall of Fame.

An Ontario Judge has yet to make his ruling on whether Councillors on the Cultural Board would constitute a conflict, Town Solicitor Warren Mar said he was unable to comment further on that issue.

‘In terms of Councillors and a staff member sitting on the board of directors and also recommending to Council to spend tax dollars towards a particular event, I just want to make sure we’re doing things right,’ said Councillor Gallo.

These concerns were echoed by Councillor Wendy Gaertner.

‘[The report does involve money, and] is written by someone who is on the board of directors,’ she said of the recommendation drafted by Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation. ‘That just doesn't seem right to me.’

In the midst of the discussion, Councillor Abel bowed out of the debate, declaring a pecuniary interest in the matter. With his

absence, the sponsorship failed on a tie vote of 4 ? 4.

With the remaining Councillors equally split on the issue, others did not have an issue with the recommendation.

?Thinking back, we have had a number of Councillors who currently sit around the table here as fundraising chairs for other organizations and they made requests of the Town,? said Councillor Michael Thompson. ?I could be wrong, but it seems a little bit of a grey area here about involvement with some of us with charitable organizations and then approaching [the Town] for sponsorship dollars.?

Municipal staff defended the recommendation, and the board, with CAO Neil Garbe stating Mr. Downey is tasked with ?representing the Town's interests on a myriad of different functions? and represents the Town with a vote on the Hall of Fame committee. This vote, he said, helps staff ?shape and guide things from the grassroots level?, something that was ?expected? of staff. He added that Council's participation within such a group is not out of the ordinary.

?There are many occasions where a Councillor has acted in an organization we support,? said Mr. Garbe. ?We support Southlake and there are people associated with the foundation. It is a frequent occurrence. [There have been] many occasions where a Council has an interest in an organization in Town and the Town supports that organization through the purchase of tickets.?

Added Mayor Geoffrey Dawe: ?I am on the board of both the [Lake Simcoe Region] Conservation Authority and the Hospital, both of which are funded by tax dollars. We had this conversation previously with respect to the Cultural Centre. It is not a new conversation.

With the vote split down the middle with Mayor Dawe and Councillors Sandra Humfryes, Thompson, and Paul Pirri in favour and Councillors Chris Ballard, Evelyn Buck, Gaertner and Gallo against, they took one last kick at the issue before adjourning the meeting, bringing it back up for reconsideration and another vote.

In order to bring the numbers back in favour, Councillor John Abel offered to resign from the Hall of Fame Committee, but without doing that through the proper channels that failed to make a difference.

?Not providing financial support for this initiative sends a clear message to [the Ontario Trillium Foundation] that we're not supporting this initiative,? said Councillor Humfryes. ?Housing the awards is wonderful, but without financial support from their local municipality, chances are they will not get that Trillium grant.?

Following Council's decision, Mr. Weese said he agreed that not sponsoring the event sends the wrong message both to the community and the Trillium Grant.

?When you don't support something, that sends a negative message to all potential sponsors. If the municipality isn't going to do it, they are not going to recognize it and celebrate it, which means they don't value it. I don't think that is the case with Council; I think that it is a case with the number of Councillors who haven't thought of it enough.?

Among the others benefiting from this year's golf tournament were the ABLE Network, which provides opportunities for adults just out of high school with intellectual challenges, and Welcoming Table, a program bringing seasonal free meals, conversation, and good company to lower income people in the community.

?This was our most successful year,? said Mayor Dawe of the \$37,500 raised this year. ?[Benefiting groups] tend to have a very broad community approach and they tend to be smaller organizations. If you look at the ABLE Network, a \$5,000 donation to the ABLE Network is a substantial income for them. It is an area where the committee feels we can make a positive impact.

?For the Welcome Table as well, that is a pretty substantial donation for them and it helps a lot of people in the community that we perhaps seem to forget from time to time.?