

Hoedown proceeds to help keep kids fit ? physically and artistically



By Brock Weir

This past spring marked a first for Aurora's Marquee Theatrical Productions. With the help of the York Region Children's Aid Society, the company hosted a March Break camp for local kids in need to ?gain amazing life skills through the arts.?

It was a runaway success for the group, says Marquee's Sheryl Thomas, but next year there is going to be a lot more room to help broaden these kids' horizons.

The non-profit Marquee has once again been selected as one of 15 local charities and non-profit organizations to partner with Magna for the annual Wild, Wild West Hoedown. In the months leading up to the September party, these groups will be hitting the pavement ? and social media ? selling raffle tickets for the event. In exchange, they will each get an equal share of the proceeds raised during York Region's biggest annual fundraiser.

?We have made great strides in the last year,? says Ms. Thomas. ?We have gained charitable status now and we have partnered with the Children's Aid Society. Last March, we had kids we comped to come to camp and the relationship just worked so brilliantly. Our fundraising efforts are now dedicated to helping underprivileged kids come to camp and our youth programs to gain amazing life skills through the arts ? because that is exactly what you get when you come to Marquee.?

Applying this year to partner with Hoedown, Marquee said their share of the profits would help at least five kids take part in the programs, along with good, strong skilled staff to make it all possible. If proceeds are as high as they have been in the past, this program of five could expand to 20 or more placements.

?I know we can do well more than five,? says Ms. Thomas. ?That is our goal.?

This year's Hoedown will go a long way in helping each of these organizations achieve what once might have appeared to be rather lofty goals. The Aurora Barbarians Rugby Club, for instance, is earmarking their share of the pot for something they have always wanted to do, but something that has been just out of reach: a rugby house league for kids under the age of 14 spanning both Aurora and Newmarket.

?This is our second time as a recipient,? says Tim Brochu of the Barbs. ?We probably need close to \$100,000 over the next five years to keep it going so having this organization help us out will [go a long way]. Rugby is almost always rep, even though they're kids from very young ages, but a mini-tournament today might be in Oakville. We want to reduce the travel time and reduce it to a Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday so people can go to their cottages on the weekend.?

Rugby, says Mr. Brochu, is a sport in which interest is growing in York Region. Participation in the Barbs alone is up 12 per cent compared to this time last year, particularly among youth. Part of the reason for this growth is the affordability of the sports. Compared to other sports, participation in rugby usually results in less of a hit on the wallet, but is also emerging as a more popular sport within schools' phys-ed and team programs.

?The amount of elite players we have in our club as well definitely helps,? Mr. Brochu adds. ?We have one of the girls in Pan Am right now. We have three girls who just got back from the National 15s championships in Edmonton.?

Over the coming weeks, The Auroran will profile additional clubs and organizations partnering on this year's Hoedown. For more information on partners ? as well as where and how you can purchase event and raffle tickets ? visit www.hoedown.ca.