

## IN GOOD COMPANY: Gift of a Lifetime

By Mayor Geoffrey Dawe

Last month, I had the opportunity to sit with Auroran editor Brock Weir to discuss some successes from the first half of my term in office, challenges our community faces as well as speak about my vision for community development in The Town of Aurora. I am very proud of the progress achieved on many fronts during the first two years of the 2010 to 2014 Council term and I am looking forward to many further successes before the term concludes.

The interview, which is available for viewing on The Auroran website, talked about creating a positive and courteous environment at Town Hall where a culture of creativity and openness could thrive. Openness is a critical prerequisite to establish accountability and spur progress. I firmly believe that much of our recent accomplishments took root in a decorum and openness to new ideas that had been largely absent in previous years.

I reflected upon this theme at length in my annual keynote address to the Aurora Chamber of Commerce on February 21 at St. Andrew's College, where I cited some notable achievements, including our new Strategic Plan, new space for youth at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex, new contract for cultural services with the Aurora Cultural Centre that provides accountability and oversight, preservation of the historic Petch House, the relocation of York Regional Police headquarters to Aurora, the arrival of Bulk Barn's new headquarters as well as new tennis facilities and a new artificial turf field.

Some of these accomplishments represent the completion of stalled initiatives from the past and some are the result of creating an environment where people want to invest in our community.

Further to this last point, I was thrilled to hear of the Stronach Group's recent proposal to create a new 34-hectare Eco Park in our community, on the east of Bayview Avenue, south of Wellington Street.

The Stronach Eco Park concept was presented at a joint committee meeting in late January and is truly breathtaking. It includes upland and lowland forests, wetlands, a habitat pond, interpretive trails, an environmental education centre as well as three soccer fields. It will allow for a variety of outdoor activities such as hiking, snowshoeing, skating, tobogganing and cross-country skiing. The abundance of wildlife habitat will be a boon for nature enthusiasts.

Plans are underway to further refine the concept for the park, including a governance structure to maintain the landscape and facilities. Opportunities for public input will be made available throughout the process.

A gift of this magnitude is truly a once in a lifetime opportunity, made possible through the generosity of Mr. Frank Stronach. The park represents a perfect example of how The Town of Aurora is working to effectively balance nature with development to create a community that enriches the lives of our residents and creates demand for families and businesses to establish themselves here. Mr. Stronach's gift will be a legacy for generations of Aurorans to come.

Part of the lure of communities like Aurora is the great events that take place in Town. We had a fantastic turn-out at our annual Arctic Adventure on Family Day and I am looking forward to another great family event on March 30 as we host the 12th annual Easter Egg Hunt at the Aurora Seniors' Centre. I hope to see you there!

Finally, I would like to comment on last week's federal budget. With \$47 billion in new spending allocated over the next 10 years, the Government of Canada's proposed infrastructure funding is both substantial and encouraging for municipalities struggling with capital repair and replacement costs.

The Gas Tax rebate will also be indexed. This rebate is an important source of revenue for our Town, which I actively lobbied our MP Lois Brown to consider in this budget cycle.

I am very pleased that through these efforts and the dedicated efforts of groups such as the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, this critical source of municipal funding has been preserved and enhanced. Municipalities currently receive \$2 billion per year through the Gas Tax rebate.

With indexing, this amount will increase by two per cent per year starting in fiscal 2014-15, helping to offset the costs of inflation and provide a consistent source of funding for our community and communities across the country.