

IN GOOD COMPANY: Successful Year

A very successful year

By Mayor Geoffrey Dawe

It seems Mother Nature is intent on giving us a white Christmas, after much milder weather the last few years. I hope that everyone gets the opportunity to go skating outdoors at Town Park and enjoy the festive lights of Aurora's Borealis.

It has been a pivotal year for progress in The Town of Aurora and I would like to take a moment to reflect on some of the many accomplishments that occurred at Town Hall in 2013.

Aurora's sesquicentennial was a special occasion that deserved both acknowledgement and celebration. Our volunteer Aurora 150 committee certainly delivered on this formidable task by organizing four events honouring our past, present and future.

On a cold February 4, we celebrated our Town's official birthday with a Mayor's Levee that included skating, broomball and sleigh rides.

In May, we paid tribute to our Town's outstanding military legacy with the Aurora Tattoo, featuring pipes and drums, highland dancing and a kid-friendly ?mudder? obstacle course with our very own Queen's York Rangers.

On Canada Day weekend, we celebrated with Music in the Park, 150 guitars and a fabulous performance by legendary Canadian rockers, Lighthouse. In September, the rain couldn't dampen our spirits as we celebrated our diversity with a cultural celebration including mystic drums and First Nations dancers.

Videos were created to commemorate our community's anniversary and they are available for viewing on our website at www.aurora.ca/150.

I am particularly pleased that our Council cut through the ?red tape? of more than a dozen years of study, discussion and debate to move forward with a new Youth Centre.

Aurora has more young people registered for programs than any other demographic, yet making a decision about a dedicated space to fill this need proved quite elusive.

Taking our Council ?on the road? to speak with the students at Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School and St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School proved just the impetus to put an end to indecision and build a dedicated space for youth at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex. As part of this addition, the entire facility is going to be modernized, which will not only benefit youth, but our entire community.

In news that can really only be characterized as fantastic, plans for a new 80-acre Eco Park are moving forward. This incredible gift from Mr. Frank Stronach and his family is a testament to what goodwill and positive, open dialogue between Town Hall and civic-minded business leaders can achieve. Truly the gift of a lifetime!

The Eco Park plans feature trails covering two-thirds of the property, an education centre and three new soccer fields to help meet the growing demand for youth soccer in our community.

From environmental preservation to downtown revitalization, we have taken important steps to implement elements of our Promenade Study. Through our Community Improvement Plan (CIP), Businesses Concierge Service, Cultural Master Plan and South-East Aurora Heritage Conservation District Study, we have been working to create an environment in which businesses and residents feel comfortable making an investment.

Many of these initiatives are still in the formative stage, but I am encouraged at early successes such as Aw, Shucks! moving into the former Thompson Furniture building. Numerous municipalities across North America are struggling with investment in their downtown core.

We are tackling this stubborn issue and I anticipate more accomplishments as our efforts progress.

As we enter into the final stretch of our term of office, I can say without reservation that it has been an honour to serve as Mayor of Aurora as well as a great learning opportunity. I have had the chance to transform a lifetime of lessons learned in the private sector into public sector success. While this has often been a tumultuous journey, it has been one worth taking.

Town Hall enjoys a stability and purpose that had been absent in the previous term, and despite a diversity of opinion around the Council table, consensus has been reached.

Consensus-building is seldom easy. I take great pride that during my tenure as Mayor, long-outstanding issues have been resolved and initiatives critical to maintaining a strong, sustainable and caring community have been advanced.

Celebrating our shared history, preserving the environment, strengthening our business sector and providing youth with opportunity are the types of legacy-building projects that will stand the test of time and shape our community for generations.

We still have much to do in 2014, but I hope that during the next few weeks you have the time to reflect upon this year's accomplishments with friends and family.

The Town is hosting our popular Family First Night festivities on Tuesday, December 31 at the Stronach Aurora Recreation Centre, which is a great way to bring in the New Year. If I don't see you there, best wishes for a safe and relaxing holiday. See you in 2014!