

## In the battle of the birthdays, Aurora has some catching up to do with Leksand



**By Brock Weir**

Age is just a number ? except when you're siblings.

If you have one, the elder is always in prime position to tell those younger a thing or two and, if you're twins, the ribbing only cuts deeper.

The same can be said for ?twinned towns? as Aurora learned last week.

On Thursday, Aurora welcomed officials from Leksand, Sweden, Aurora's ?twinned? Town for a multi-day visit of governance and cultural exchanges.

At the welcoming ceremony, Mayor Ulrika Liljeberg said the visit they were undertaking was made all the more special coinciding with the 150th Anniversary of Confederation on Saturday ? but added with a smile we still have a bit of catching up to do.

?150 years is quite a long time, but I have to say we are preparing for our anniversary next year and in Leksand it is 700 years!? she said. ?We like 150 years, but we're sort of past that.?

A bit of teasing aside, it was a warm welcome all around as Mayor Liljeberg, Vice Mayor Anna-Lie Stenberg, and City Manager Göran Wigert, were greeted at Town Hall by Mayor Geoff Dawe, members of Council, Aurora's Federal and Provincial representatives, and Town Staff for a few days of governance talks, cultural exchanges, and being honoured guests at Aurora's 150 Bash.

Aurora's links with the Swedish community were forged in 1971 when the Council of the day invited hockey players from Sweden to participate in a tourney with the Aurora Midget Hockey teams. It was the first of many exchanges, including a notable battle between Leksand and the local ?Church Dodgers? in which flags were exchanged for on-ice victories, and by 1976, the ?twinning? was formalized.

?There is no question that Canada and Sweden have much in common,? said Leona Alleslev, MP for Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill. ?We share similar values and passions [including] our love of hockey, but we also share a commitment to peacekeeping, sustainable development, protecting the environment and promoting human rights both at home and abroad. Canada and Sweden are also two of the founding members of the Arctic Council where we work together to ensure that the achievements of environmental, social and economic sustainable development in the Arctic Region. These are just a few of the foundational elements that contribute to the strong Canadian-Swedish bilateral relationships that we are privileged to enjoy today.

Noting that the concept of ?twinning? began in the aftermath of the Second World War as a way to foster peace and understanding after a time of such destruction, Ms. Alleslev said ?twinning? continues to be relevant in today's society, particularly in an era of globalization where relationships are more easily forged.

?Canada 150 inspires all Canadians to be part of something bigger than ourselves as we build the country for the next 150 years,? she said. ?But in this time of unprecedented world instability where both economic and defence and security relationships are increasingly fragile it would be easy for Canada to look inward, but that is not who we are as Canadians. We believe we have a responsibility and a contribution to make to the world as global citizens and Canadians believe we are stronger because of the relationships we have in the world, relationships with countries but also at an individual and personal level like the one we're here to celebrate today between our two cities.

?The challenges of today and tomorrow are not those that will be solved by one city or even one country. It will take all of us: our innovation, our intellectual capital, and our search for excellence to preserve our strengths. I look forward to the ideas, approaches, and perspectives that you will discover on this trip and in the future.?

And there was much on the agenda. In addition to talks with Town Hall officials, the itinerary included meetings with community groups, roundtable discussions and being key players in the Canada Day festivities, both in the Parade as well as the Park and Fireworks activities.

?We're very appreciative of the long relationship we have had with Leksand,? said Mayor Dawe. ?Both towns have many similarities that bring us close together. We are both very involved in the sporting world, the recognition that culture and heritage can unite a community. We're hoping this meeting will help strengthen our friendship with Leksand and we can both share some best practices on how do we both move forward as we build our communities.

?We are very proud of our Town and we are very much looking forward to showing you the Town. I am looking forward to continuing the partnership for years to come and I want to thank you for being here.?

The feeling was mutual, as Mayor Liljeberg, who looked out and saw a few people filling Council Chambers who had been part of those early exchanges.

?When I Instagrammed [we were coming to Aurora] I had young women say, ?I was there playing soccer when I was a kid' so this is a mutual thing that is really alive,? she said. ?We're also here to plan for the future because we have similar challenges we face from a very common ground with peacekeeping and environmental issues, I might even say from a liberal point of view. I think, even in this global world, the personal meanings are more and more important.?