

INSIDE AURORA: Getting to Know You

By Scott Johnston

There's nothing like adversity to bring folks together, and one of the most adverse events (at least, natural ? not political) in recent Aurora memory was the ice storm and subsequent blackouts last December.

In some cases only one or two houses in a neighbourhood were without power. In other areas, whole swaths of town were blacked out.

Sadly for us, my wife and I were amongst the several thousand powerless Powerstream customers that month.

Fortunately, the day we lost power we had already made plans to be in Toronto, so were able to keep warm and well lit remotely through much of the day.

It was fascinating to drive back up the DVP and 404 on our way home late that afternoon, and see large densely populated areas with not a hint of light shining from homes, streetlights or stores.

Taking this as a sign that darkness likely still prevailed on our street, on our way back through town we dropped into a local restaurant north of Bayview and Wellington, where they still had power.

Not surprisingly, it was full of newly-minted residents of the 19th century like ourselves.

One of the things that we noticed was how much more inter-table communication was going on. People were turned sideways, and in some cases completely around, chatting with folks with whom they obviously did not arrive.

When we go out for dinner we don't normally strike up conversations with diners at other tables, but so many of us were in the same boat, it seemed an obvious thing to do, so we joined the trend.

We chatted to a few other people within earshot, finding out from what dark parts of town they had escaped, sharing tales of the decreasing novelty of being without power, and revelling at how positively balmy it was in the restaurant compared to home, even sitting beside a door that opened every few minutes to admit more refugees and sub-zero temperature breezes.

Between the company and the shirtsleeve temperatures, not to mention the much-appreciated hot food, it was a surprisingly pleasant evening out.

The next day, power had not returned overnight, and our wishful thinking as we lay in bed that morning was not enough to encourage it to snap back on. So, we layered up and headed to a local coffee shop, for some much-needed interior and exterior warmth.

Again, we found our choice of venues packed, and again, based on some impromptu discussions with our neighbouring diners, many of the folks were those without power.

It was an enjoyable time, bonding with our newly-discovered neighbours over coffee and shared deprivations. It reminded me to some extent of the spontaneous natural connection between Aurorans that seems to take place during big outdoor town events like the Street Festival or Concerts in the Park.

Fortunately the power came back on for us the following day, and like everyone else, we were soon re-engrossed in catching up on backlogged holiday preparations.

With those activities now well behind us, we have had occasion in recent weeks to drop into both the same restaurant and coffee shop.

In both cases it seemed eerily silent and subdued.

They were no sidebar conversations going on between tables, or similar sharing of experiences. People were focused on their meals, and dinner companions. All the spontaneity and impromptu camaraderie were gone.

I guess that's how it always is.

I'm not glad we had the ice storm, but looking back, one benefit is that for a few days at least, many residents bonded with their fellow Aurorans in the depths of winter in a way that isn't the norm.

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