

Local dance instructors reflect on a decade of Dancing with the Easter Seals Stars



After opening up their ballroom dance school on Industrial Parkway South, burgeoning business owners Anastasia Trutneva, Kelly Stacey, and Patrick Derry sought ways to become more involved in the Aurora community.

What began as a way to help local community leaders strut their stuff on the dance floor while making a difference for charity, has grown into a decade of giving for the principals behind Artistica Ballroom Dance Studios and, as they put the finishing touches on the choreography behind this year's milestone tenth anniversary edition of Dancing with the Easter Seals Stars Aurora Newmarket, they're reflecting on a whirlwind decade that has taken them places they never expected to go.

"In our first year, we truly had no idea what to expect," says Trutneva. "We initially saw it as a great opportunity to showcase our up-and-coming studio; however, we quickly realized the immense impact we could make over the years. By teaming up with community stars, we learned how much of a difference we could collectively achieve by uniting an amazing community for an incredible cause."

Derry adds it was the first experience working within the Aurora and Newmarket communities and while they thought Dancing with the Easter Seals Stars would be a good way to use their talents to "do a little bit of good for a great cause, we didn't realize that it would introduce us to so many great leaders in the community and inspire us to want to continue."

"Our love for this community has only grown over the years," he says. "We have no interest in stopping and hope that we can inspire other businesses as we were once inspired to pitch in more and make this community a better place."

The event has, looking back over its first decade, "evolved to be more impactful and entertaining, pushing the envelope on choreography, and what these performances could be.

"I think this event reminds us that when we band together as a community and support one another, we recognize the love and kindness we can all tap into a small reminder of our own humanity," she says. "Sometimes you need to lead by example and we know our efforts are seen by the community, and like a ripple effect, we see our enthusiasm being mirrored in other events and organizations."

For Stacey, some of her favourite memories of the first ten years are of the rehearsals before the show.

"There's always a moment when we are teaching the choreography when the stars realize what they've gotten themselves into, and

the brief moment of, 'Uh-oh, can I even do this?' The fuel is knowing that they can, of course! Watching them develop confidence and the skills they never knew they had has to be one of the most rewarding things I've been privileged to witness to.

Similarly, Trutneva cites the moments just before the show itself as being particularly fun to look back on.

'All the hard work is done, the fundraising pushed to the maximum and all that's left is to go out and give it your all,' she says. 'The camaraderie and team energy built in that moment always means the world to me.'

Adds Derry: 'What stands out the most to me are the people. I've made great friends and met incredible people that lead this community into a brighter future. I've met kids that have benefited from Easter Seals and grown into incredible people. Getting to know the people that Easter Seals helps is the biggest thing that fuels me. They are intelligent, driven adults who got the chance to grow and reach their potential because of Easter Seals. That is a really special thing and a really great cause.'

As this year's milestone approaches, they hope fundraising efforts this year can help them go well over the threshold of \$1 million over the last 10 years.

Local celebrities set to take the floor this year on October 9 at the Royal Venetian Mansion include Tracy Smith of Kitchen Table CEOs, restaurateur Martin McQueen, Phil Rose of the Town of Aurora, lawyer Jay Willmot, entrepreneur Shabi Monzavi, Aurora Black Community Association founder Phiona Durrant, restaurant owner Samantha Buckley, and Easter Seals Ambassador Daniella Altieri.

Altieri's participation is a particular point of pride for the dance instructors as they see it as a true full-circle moment.

'It's everything,' says Derry. 'It's for Daniela who was given opportunities through Easter Seals that allowed her to show the world who she is. She's smart, and funny, and driven, and can do anything she wants now - including dance, which is why it is so important for more of the kids that Easter Seals helps to see her out there, so that they can see themselves in her.'

'This is as full-circle as it comes,' adds Stacey. 'We are beyond proud of Daniela to be the first to ever do it and we hope it's the first of many more to come.'

This year's theme is A Night at the Silver Screen and the Artistica family and the collection of celebs are working on iconic numbers set to iconic movie music.

'The movies have given us some pretty iconic songs over the years!' says Stacey. 'We kicked off [picking the music] by sifting through soundtracks and doing a lot of research. Especially when it came to our opening number - we needed a song to tie it all together, kick off the show with big energy, and set the tone for the theme - I think we nailed it!'

Trutneva notes that two of the celebrities she's paired with helped take out some of the guesswork and had their own movie music in mind - while all three promise some surprises.

'This is going to be a show to remember,' says Derry. 'All of the numbers are incredible. We have a few surprises up our sleeves that I just know are going to knock people's socks off. I won't say much more now, but people will want to be there!'

For more information on next week's Dancing with the Easter Seals Stars Aurora-Newmarket, including how to secure your tickets and support your favourite dancers, visit eastersealsdancing.org/newmarket.

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