

## Magna brings curtain down on traditional Hoedown party

Once York Region's biggest parties, raising millions for local charities and non-profits over three decades, Magna's 2019 Wild, Wild West has turned out to be the grand finale of a storied local tradition.

Following three years of uncertainty, the party under the big top, which regularly brought top and emerging country stars to the community for two days of music, food and fun has drawn to a close.

“Like many organizations, the pandemic caused us to pause and reflect on all of our core programs and initiatives, not just the Magna Hoedown,” said Magna's Erin Cerenzia in an email to The Auroran. “As a company, we are focused on continuous improvement and finding innovative solutions in the mobility technology world, and, of course, in how we approach our philanthropic engagement to better the communities in which we live and operate.

“The pandemic allowed us to test-run a new approach that honoured the spirit of the Hoedown through donations to local charities and virtual promotion to raise awareness of the work they do.”

These new approaches will continue through the establishment of the Magna Community Fund, a new partnership between the auto parts giant and the Town of Aurora.

The program, according to a statement from the Town of Aurora, will support both York Region-based charities and non-profits \$10 million each year as well as municipal events.

“We're grateful to Magna for their ongoing dedication to the Town of Aurora,” said Mayor Tom Mrakas. “This partnership will allow us to enhance our summer programming for residents and will provide our local charitable organizations with much-needed support to continue their important work.”

In 2020, 2021, and 2022, when the Hoedown's future was uncertain, a similar fund, the Hoedown Community Fund, kept the charitable momentum going, with an average of 20 charities and non-profits benefiting from the cause each year.

The 10 charities and non-profits to benefit from this year's Magna Community Fund will also see ongoing promotional opportunities from the Town.

“The long-lasting impact of Magna's philanthropic work extends well beyond Hoedown and it is not something that is changing,” Cerenzia continued. “The core of the event, from its inception, was always about bringing neighbours together to support local charities. Throughout its 30+ year history, York Region residents helped raise over \$14 million for hundreds of community organizations. Today, Magna is continuing this work through the Magna Community Fund, its Neighbourhood Network department and our philanthropic donations here at home and around the globe.

“The Magna Community Fund will continue this important legacy and Magna's continued commitment to supporting the communities in which we operate.”

Applications for the Magna Community Fund will be accepted through July 28 at 3 p.m. and interested charities and non-profits can apply via [nnetwork.org/MCF](http://nnetwork.org/MCF).

This year's beneficiaries are expected to be announced August 4.

While community leaders are glad to see Magna continue to honour the legacy and spirit of the Magna Hoedown, some agree that the spirit of the in-person event will be a loss for Aurora and the Region.

?I think we all saw it coming,? says Steve Hinder, who took a lead role in organizing the annual event while serving as Manager of Neighbourhood Network. ?COVID certainly didn't help and there's more time to reflect. Communities change and Magna has changed and is refocusing some of its commitments. Hoedown happened basically because it was an idea of Frank and Belinda Stronach and family. They supported it for so long. Although we knew it was coming, it was just a victim of change. But I do think the one thing that Hoedown brought more than any other thing to this community was the sense of community.

?In those final years we had 700 volunteers roll their sleeves up for two days of three events. Without the support of the corporation, the volunteers, staff, they could never happen. It really was a true partnership. What I think it did is it really built community. It made us different, because that is a huge undertaking to ask that many people to step up and get involved, but I think the Town and the people who attended Hoedown every year kind of took ownership of it and saw it as part of their DNA, part of our community, something that every year we looked forward to.

Frank Stronach agreed the event is a loss for the community.

?I am kind of sad and disappointed,? he said. ?The size that Magna is, [the Hoedown] is a tiny, minute fraction, but it really created great relationships with the community. I always thought community should know what to do to get to know the people who run it via events like this; sometimes you get to know their concerns, their likes, their dislikes ? it's just great interfacing.?

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