

Magna marks Hoedown's 25th Anniversary



By Brock Weir

If you ever set out to make \$7 million from your backyard barbeque, you better promise the public something they want.

Evidently Magna founder Frank Stronach had just the right recipe when he threw open his property over 25 years ago to lay the groundwork for what has become the company's annual Wild West Hoedown. Now entering its second quarter century this year, organizers are upping the ante to make this a Hoedown for the ages.

From its humble beginnings, it has spent the last 25 years growing to become one of York Region's largest and most popular fundraisers, raising over \$7 million since its founding ? \$542,000 last year alone.

Each year, Hoedown partners with 20 community organizations, serving people from all walks of life and tapping into a variety of community needs ? but 20 groups for their 25th anniversary didn't sound right. Organizers have now upped the ante, dividing proceeds from this year's ticket sales amongst 25 groups.

Among this year's groups ? and your first point of contact for snagging the coveted event tickets before they are on sale to the general public this August ? include the Aurora Barbarians Rugby Club, the Aurora Youth Soccer Club, Autism Ontario York Region, Big Brothers Big Sisters of York, Community Living Newmarket Aurora, Epilepsy York Region, Habitat for Humanity, Marquee Theatrical Productions, The Doane Georgina, Richmond Hill Hospices Collaborative, Safehaven, Welcoming Arms, the Women's Centre of York Region, Yellow Brick House, York Simcoe Minor Football Association, and York Support Services Network.

The yee-haws sounded by each organization on the Stronach farm, Adena Springs, on Friday morning signalled that they are very happy with the chance to take part and share the wealth.

?We have a very diverse group serving all sorts of organizations right across the Region and that speaks to a huge success, not only for organizations but for Hoedown,? said Steve Hinder of Magna for the Community. ?Hoedown is successful because we get great support from our community.?

This support was echoed by Mayors Geoffrey Dawe of Aurora and Tony Van Bynen of Newmarket, who thanked the company for their ongoing support of the community.

?Putting this together, you enable our community organizations to build better communities, to make life better for somebody else, and that is an important part of the Magna commitment to their community and that is something we sincerely appreciate,? said

Mayor Van Bynen.

Magna CEO Don Walker attended Friday's launch riding high on company pride. The previous afternoon, the Company's stock, he said, closed for the first time at over \$70, and he noted as long as Magna continues to be a profitable group, the annual party will continue.

"It is quite amazing that this has been going on for 25 years," he said. "I remember the early days and it has been fantastic to see it continue to grow. We have a criteria for what we do for charitable events and it is really nice to be doing the Hoedown every year because it is in our hometown. We have a lot of great people, it's a great cause and it is really nice to see the community grow together."

Over the past two-and-a-half decades, organizers have learned, for better or worse, that the show must go on. While they are undoubtedly hoping for good weather by the time people start filling the tent September 14 dressed in their best western duds, questionable weather has forged some of the strongest Hoedown memories.

"I think my favourite year was when we had multiple tents put together and it was raining - it was like a waterfall coming down into Hoedown every place where the tents joined and people were walking around in six inches of mud," Mr. Walker told The Auroran with a laugh. "I think by the end of the night people were running and sliding and diving into all the mud piles."

Mayor Dawe's first Hoedown memories were forged at the very first outing, but mud too plays a part in the years that followed.

"The one that sticks in your mind was the rain bowl," he said. "The fields where people were parking were so muddy they couldn't get their cars out. They brought a tractor in to pull cars out. Friends of ours were covered in mud trying to get their car out. It was just a fun, fun night."

This year, as it is every year, the entertainment lineup is Magna's best kept secret. One sure thing, however, is Hoedown-goers will be treated to songs from this year's winner of the Hoedown Showdown, a returning tradition from years past. Local songsters are encouraged to warm up their vocals and head over to www.hoedown.ca to apply. Selected applicants will be able to show off at Aurora's RibFest at the beginning of September.

This year's annual Wild, Wild West Hoedown gets underway Saturday, September 14, at "The Magna Corral" (Stronach Boulevard and Wellington Street East) at 5 p.m., running to midnight. Tickets are \$75 each and available for sale from the party's 25 community partners. Proceeds from ticket sales, raffle sales, silent auction, and other event festivities are shared amongst these organizations. Tickets will also be for sale to the general public beginning August 10 and will be available from Neighbourhood Network and Jonathan's Restaurant.

Organizers promise a Texas-style barbeque dinner, cash bar, silent auction, Prospectors Raffle with a grand prize of \$75,000 and line dancing.