

Microtel helps Aurora complete missing pieces of tourism puzzle



Last week, Aurora marked the formal grand opening of its latest hotel, Microtel Inn & Suites by Wyndham.

Attended by Mayor Tom Mrakas, members of the Aurora Chamber of Commerce, and other dignitaries, the formal opening of the hotel, which is located on Goulding Avenue in the heart of the Leslie Street business lands, was heralded as a shot in the arm for local businesses and groups as they look to come out of the global pandemic.

?Four short years ago, we had no hotels and now we have two ? it is very exciting,? said Mayor Tom Mrakas, referencing the Holiday Inn Express, which opened last year just up the street. ?It's an exciting time, I think, in our Town [and] we're exploding with enthusiasm. What better way to come out of the pandemic than to have a second hotel opening! We're very excited to have you guys join the Town of Aurora and our business community in providing a wonderful service that is going to be much-needed, from a cultural aspect to our sporting community. Thank you for picking Aurora.?

This enthusiasm was shared by David Donaldson of MasterBUILT hotels.

Based out of Calgary, this is MasterBUILT's first foray into the GTA.

?We're very excited about having this hotel open,? said Donaldson. ?It has been a long development cycle for us, most of that is internally in terms of the things we needed to do to get ourselves organized to come out east. We have a number of projects we're building in the eastern part of Canada and into the Maritimes. We're very excited about Aurora being the first.

?It's a great community. It's nice to have 100 rooms open. This is going to be a great market for us. The construction costs, relatively speaking, came in at around \$22 million [which] is a big commitment for a four-person-owned company from Calgary! We're thrilled to be able to push into the eastern market and thrilled to be here in Aurora.?

The Town, from a tourism perspective, is also thrilled to have another hotel open in the community ? with a third now in the site plan development stage, again in the Leslie and Wellington area.

?This is a huge opportunity for our hotels, and also for our Town, to be able to promote new assets for groups and tournaments,? says Lisa Hausz, Economic Development Officer for the Town of Aurora.

Looking down the road, Ms. Hausz says the two current hotels will become involved in sport tourism strategies through hosting tournaments, offering packages to incoming groups, and more.

?The hotels are very keen to participate in that piece,? she says.

Both hotels have opened during the global pandemic, which might make it difficult to gauge metrics on how they might help the community reach its tourism goals, but that is something the Economic Development department is tackling.

?We want to know where the future is going to be,? says Hausz. ?Do you compare [metrics] to 2019, which is a very different view, or through the pandemic? One of our best resources is Central Counties Tourism, a regional tourism office of the Province and I have tapped into their resources for exactly that kind of data. What they're going to be helping us in are the impacts for 2019, comparing 2020 and 2022, and helping us try to forecast what that could look like going forward. It's a huge resource for us since Aurora hasn't really been in the tourism business before, but now with hotels we see that opportunity.

?I think there is definite potential with having Niagara College and the Canadian Food & Wine Institute using the Armoury at Town Park. It is an asset that started during the pandemic and being really able to leverage that partnership in attracting a major food competition and all accessory attractions that we can get from that ? it will fill hotels, it will have people in the Downtown, and it is definitely an opportunity we're looking forward to.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter