

Millennials usher in new era for local youth art



By Brock Weir

The Aurora Cultural Centre's Brevik Hall was bursting at the seams with proud parents and proud students alike as they brought up the curtain on a new era in local youth art.

Each winter, the Aurora Cultural Centre turns its galleries over to local Grade 12 art students to curate and showcase works of their own. This has been an enduring tradition for seven years running, but this year there was an added twist.

With sponsorship from the Mayor's Office and Geranium Homes, the newly re-dubbed Mayor's Celebration of Youth Arts brought performing arts to the mix.

Those gathered at the Centre for the exhibition's opening ceremonies were treated not only to a chance to speak to the artists about their work, but an evening of live drama, music and more.

"This is an exciting time for the Centre as it celebrates Aurora High School, Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School and St. Maximilian Kolbe for the month of February," said the Centre's Stephanie Nicolo, who helped the students curate the exhibition, noting over 120 pieces of artwork adorned the gallery walls from sculptures, to paintings, to digital productions.

Ms. Nicolo paid particular attention to these digital masterpieces because most of the participating artists were born in 2000, when the emerging digital era had much of the world in a manufactured flap.

"We were afraid of the two numbers 'zero-zero' and partied like it was 1999 and waited for the ball to drop," said Ms. Nicolo, bringing most of the people in attendance born prior to 1999 down to earth with a thud. "The only people who are laughing are the ones who actually lived it."

She was right.

"This was Y2K and it is important because they are the ones who are in this room; they were born of that particular year. You artists born in 2000 are the first generation in the Youth Arts program to be of the new millennium and I think that is important to note because this is the first year we have in this exhibition digital media at the forefront and zero-zero is really important.

"You are not afraid of those two numbers. They are your language and we can't wait to see what you create. What you have already created in the galleries is inspirational enough. The show is spectacular? be proud and stand tall."

Among the dignitaries in attendance for the grand opening were Suzanne Haines, Executive Director of the Aurora Cultural Centre, who was presiding over her first Youth Arts gallery opening since her appointment last spring, and Geoff Dawe, who lent his mayoral title to the occasion.

"This is such a great opportunity to showcase the youth talent in our Town and our school system," said Mayor Dawe. "We are so lucky to have this venue and the dedicated people who work here and volunteer here, and we're so lucky to have the teaching and instruction at the high schools, teachers who are so passionate about their love for art, for all forms of art, and passing that onto their students.

"We are very fortunate to have the parents who go out of their way to make sure their kids have this opportunity, whether it is picking them up late at school, getting them there early, coming out tonight to support them. I have been to every event we've had

here and it just seems to be getting better. I am really looking forward to the expansion of the event.?

Due to attend was Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MP Leona Alleslev, but snow kept her plane grounded in Ottawa. Instead, she was represented by Melanie Anderson who delivered words on her behalf.

?We are so lucky to have youth that, who may or may not know it, inspire others to achieve greatness with their dedication to the arts. I would like to thank the students for sharing their art with us for this exhibit and the teachers, families and friends who inspire them along the way. I would also like to thank Mayor Geoff Dawe and the Aurora Cultural Centre who continue to encourage our youth to dream boldly and provide the opportunity to showcase their incredible talent with the community.?