

New and familiar faces form Aurora's new Council



Out of a field of 28 candidates for Council, the only certainty going into this election was there would be at least two new faces at the Council table.

Aurora voters, however, elected three: Jeff Thom, Harold Kim and Tom Mrakas.

The three newcomers join incumbents John Abel, Sandra Humfries, Michael Thompson, Wendy Gaertner and Paul Pirri at the table.



Councillor John Abel



Councillor Sandra Humfries



Councillor Michael Thompson



Councillor-elect Jeff Thom



Councillor Wendy Gaertner



Councillor-elect Harold Kim



Councillor-elect Tom Mrakas



Councillor Paul Pirri

Whether they were new or veterans to the political arena, one thing that united each of the eight on Monday night was a sense of feeling humbled Aurorans voted to put their trust in them.

"I am so proud to be elected again," said Councillor John Abel, who said residents sent out a clear message in their decision. "That message is to continue moving forward in a positive manner. I have a motto that actions speak and being involved in the community is one of the best ways to engage and understand what the needs and wants are for our community. The best thing you can do is get out there and get involved."

Councillor Sandra Humfries said she was nervous about Monday night, but was thrilled at the result.

"It is absolutely humbling," she said. "It is an amazing privilege and honour. I am overwhelmed and beyond ecstatic and I can't wait to continue [on Council]. I love it and I hope voters found they could relate to me in terms of being a down-to-earth resident of Aurora who loves where we live, loves what Aurora is all about, and I put my heart and soul into it like they would."

For Michael Thompson, the feeling going through his mind, he said, was "relief."

"There were some anxious moments today, but it is a great honour to be re-elected and to serve residents," he said, noting this experience was very different from the 2010 election where although he had run unsuccessfully four years previously, he began to have traction. "You want to knock on as many doors as possible. I felt a bit more pressure this time around than last time. Four years ago when I was running, I didn't know what to expect, you try your best, but this time I had a better idea."

Jeff Thom was the only fresh face to crack the Top Five, a statistic he says is "unbelievable." With an extensive network of support, he had a good feeling going into Election Day about his position, but the numbers surprised him.

"We worked really hard and after you work so hard and put that much effort in it, it feels really awesome when you can be successful," he said. "Most of the people that got on Council and have finished in the top eight care about Aurora, they want it to move forward in a positive way and that is what I want to do."

"I want to work with the other seven Councillors and Mayor Dawe to move the Town's business forward positively. I think there is room for some debate, but with the eight Councillors and the Mayor we elected last night, we are going to be able to move the Town forward in a positive way."

With Councillor Evelyn Buck missing re-election to Council by just 41 votes, Councillor Wendy Gaertner takes over as the most seasoned Council member, having first been elected and re-elected continuously since 2003.

"It is a responsibility," said Councillor Gaertner. "[Being re-elected] feels great. I think I received votes from across the community because people appreciate the hard work that I have done for eleven years. There are so many 'thank-yous' for this."

Looking back over the course of the campaign, Harold Kim says it is hard to believe this was only a three or four month campaign, but the end result "feels like a dream."

"It feels like a good dream and I am very appreciative, humbled and honoured the residents of Aurora elected me," he said. "I do feel a lot of pressure to make sure I fulfil the expectations Aurorans put out for me, but all I can do is my best, and I think if I can do my best I can live with that."

Over the course of the campaign, he said he heard from people championing issues like the Oak Ridges Moraine, Aurora Community Tennis Club, and Aurora Cultural Centre, and Mr. Kim says he wants to work with these individuals to make sure "these issues get resolved to their satisfaction."

For first time candidate Tom Mrakas, his win on Monday night was "overwhelming" in terms of the support he received from the public.

?It was a crazy night with numbers bouncing back and forth,? he said. ?I was a little bit stressed, but now I am happy, excited and anxious to get started and give back to Aurora voters. [I think what struck a chord] was the thought of getting things done, rolling up my sleeves, and not beating around the bush. The most rewarding aspect of the campaign was going door to door and meeting with everyday Aurorans and seeing what their concerns are and the positive attitude everyone actually has. They don't want negative campaigning. They want to know what you can do and what you will do. It is so refreshing that people don't want that negative aspect.?

Another candidate who might have felt a bit stressed on Monday night was Councillor Paul Pirri who teeter-tottered near the bottom of the Top 10 until landing in eighth place after almost all ballots had been counted ? a similar position he faced when first elected in 2010.

?I said four years ago that [being in that position] is never something I want to do again, but I am very happy to have the opportunity to do it again this year,? he said, with a laugh. ?I look forward to serving the residents of Aurora over the next four years. Everybody elected ran a nice, well thought out, clean campaign and I do actually look forward to working with everyone.?