

Newly-elected councillor Jeff Thom wants to lend a voice to Oak Ridges Moraine



By Brock Weir

For a first-time candidate, watching the results roll in was a 'tense' experience for political newcomer Jeff Thom but it was ultimately worthwhile.

Mr. Thom is one of three new faces, along with Harold Kim and Tom Mrakas, due to join Aurora's Council next month.

With family and good friends on hand on election night, it would have turned out to be a good night whichever way the chips fell, but a win obviously made everything sweeter.

'I was quite surprised,' says Mr. Thom of his fourth place finish, coming in behind incumbents John Abel, Sandra Humfryes, and Michael Thompson. 'I worked very hard over the election, but when the first polls came in I thought, 'Oh, my goodness. This is amazing!' As soon as I realised I was going to be one of the top eight, I had that weight [of responsibility] in the back of my mind. There is that feeling that people put their trust in you and now you have to deliver. You don't want to let them down. That is a feeling I have and something I will continue to feel over the next four years.'

A resident of Aurora's Downtown Core, Mr. Thom knew going into this election it's impossible to knock on every door in Aurora, but he tried to hit as many homes as possible. There were areas where he knew many residents and others that were a bit less familiar, but he wanted to get to a good mix of areas he felt were representative of Town.

As he went door-to-door in the last few weeks of the campaign, he says one of the things that really struck him was the positivity of people at the door. These people, he said, were often struck that a younger person was running (he's 28), interested in the Town, and expressed a need for 'new blood' at the table.

'That is the most consistent thing I heard from people, that they were looking for a younger voice going forward,' says Mr. Thom.

But while voters are undoubtedly getting another younger voice at the table, they are getting one that is rooted in the history of Aurora, Ontario, and Canada. Having taken history at university, Mr. Thom says he developed a passion for Canada's history and that has had a trickle-down effect at the Provincial and Municipal levels.

'I want to look into ways I can help protect the history of our Town and work with the Aurora Historical Society, and that can take many forms,' he says. 'It can be just as much as promoting the Historical Society and getting people involved in the history of our Town. I am not sure if my youth will add anything to that, but I have a passion for history and that is something I am just excited to

get going when I am on Council.?

He is also excited about history yet-to-come, he says, as he has a strong desire to be a voice at the table for protecting the Oak Ridges Moraine. With legislation set to come up for review at the Provincial level in 2015, he says he wants to be involved with steering that legislation.

?I would like to become involved and making sure we can protect the Oak Ridges Moraine,? he says. ?One thing I heard on the doorstep quite a bit is Aurorans are keen to protect our green space and our natural heritage. I think it is important we have a strong voice from Council on that as well.?

With Aurora voters selecting two candidates on Council under the age of 30, incumbent Paul Pirri being the other, it is also important to look at ways of engaging younger voters, says Mr. Thom. As a political science student, he says there was no shortage of angles from which to attack the problem of declining voter turnout, whether it was apathy or disengagement.

?It seems like younger people are part of that demographic that turns out less,? he says.

?My whole philosophy is being solution-oriented in business. That is how I am at my place of work and in pretty much all aspects of my life. I want to be a collaborative voice and a solution-oriented person and I want to be open and accessible to people.

?I will relish the opportunity to get out and talk to as many people in Aurora as possible. I am not sure whether or not by meeting with people I can get them excited about voting, but I think the more people you can get interested in the political process and government at any level the chances are they will probably vote in the next election.?