

Over half a million reasons to Hoedown



By Brock Weir

Aurora was a mecca for country music fans on Friday and Saturday for the thirty-first Magna Hoedown.

Featuring music from headliners Alan Doyle of Great Big Sea and James Barker Band, York Region's biggest annual party raised nearly \$518,000, which will be shared between 20 community organizations and partnerships.

Participating in ? and benefiting from ? this year's festivities are Abuse Hurts, Aurora FC, the Aurora Tigers, Autism Ontario & Kerry's Place Autism Services, Big Brothers Big Sisters of York & Epilepsy York Region, Community Living Central York, DeafBlind Ontario Services, Easter Seals, Hospice Georgina and Georgina Arts, the Lake Simcoe Soccer Club, Learning Disabilities Association of York Region, Literacy Council York-Simcoe & Learning Centre for Georgina, Marquee Theatrical Productions, Newmarket Redmen, Pulsars Gymnastics, St. John Ambulance, the Food Bank of York Region, Victim Services of York Region, the Women's Centre of York Region and the York Pride Festival.

Before the big top opened for the general public on Friday night, the tent played host to a milestone: the fifth anniversary of the Student Hoedown, an event organized by York Region teachers that is tailor-made for local students with disabilities.

?Five years of Student Hoedown ? congratulations! said co-founder Derek Bunn, before a sea of students, caregivers, and volunteers on the dance floor. ?Helping people in the community, coming with donations that help organizations like Abuse Hurts, Big Brothers, Big Sisters, Community Living and a whole host of others is just amazing. This is what the spirit of Hoedown is all about: community partnerships and giving back.?

Participating students had the chance to get a sneak preview of the evening's entertainment courtesy of the Top 10 contestants in the Hoedown Showdown, the Ontario-wide talent search for Canada's next country star.

The event had special resonance for finalist Dayna Reid of Elmvale, who said the love of music shared by her brother, who lives with autism, inspires her every day.

After warming up in front of the students in morning, the Top Ten were primed and ready to take the stage Friday night, opening for Alan Doyle.

Singing two songs each, third place (\$1,000) went to Evan Farrell of Stouffville, followed in second place (\$1,500) by Sarah Campbell Mills of Burlington, and, winning the grand prize pack worth over \$25,000, including a professional recording session ? Dayna Reid.

?Before I went up on stage, I was pretty nervous, but I thought in my head, ?Let's just do this and get it done,"? she told The Auroran after her win. ?When you see the crowd and their energy, it gives you so much motivation to keep going and have fun with it. That was the most fun I have ever had on stage.?

Over the last little while, Ms. Reid says she has pushed everything aside to really focus on music and make it a career. Following her year as the Hoedown Showdown winner, she hopes to be performing ?full-time and full-on.?

?I don't want to do anything else,? she said.

Well, immediately following her win, there was one other thing at the top of her to-do list.

?My brother's love of music really drove me to try and do good in this competition,? she said. ?I just want him to be proud, to be honest. He couldn't be here tonight, but I am excited to go home to him and give him a big hug!?