

Pickering College wants to be "voice of Aurora"

By Brock Weir

Nearly two years ago, a group of residents came forward with 101.5 CHRA, dubbed "Radio Aurora." But, while Aurora waits patiently for the proposed radio station to hit the airwaves, Pickering College students are stepping up to the plate wanting to be that local voice.

Last week, Sterling Mancuso, a Grade 12 student at the Newmarket private school, along with Grade 5 student Bryce Osinga came to Council seeking a community partnership which would make the school's own community radio station, 102.7 CHOP-FM "the voice of Aurora."

95 year ago, December 9, 1921, marked a milestone in Canadian broadcasting history," said the school in their video pitch to Council. "In a small room at Pickering College, a 21 year old alumnus named E.S. Ted Rogers sat at his telegraph key, took a deep breath, and tapped out a message in Morse Code: He was the only Canadian to successfully compete in the first amateur transatlantic radio competition transmitting a signal across the Atlantic to Scotland. In 1925, Rogers revolutionized the radio tube, allowing radios to operate on an ordinary household electric current rather than batteries."

From there, Toronto radio station CFRB was founded and son Ted Rogers went on to establish the family's telecommunications empire we know today.

Now, Pickering College wants Aurora to be part of this storied history.

102.7 CHOP FM was founded in 2007 with a grant from alumnus Jim Waters. It is the only CRTC-licensed station in Canada for a school serving students from Junior Kindergarten up to Grade 12.

Focused on supporting local business and non-profits the station currently has a broadcasting area from Green Lane in the north to Wellington Street in the south, bordered on both sides by Bathurst Street and Bayview Avenue. Thanks to the continued support of the Waters family, they plan to significantly boost their broadcasting area to cover all of Aurora "and beyond" in the very near future.

"We have many unique programs at Pickering College including the Global Leadership Program," said Sterling. "This is a program which seeks to inspire students to become the agents of courageous, ethical and positive change, true to Quaker values. We also have creative writing programs, an award-winning filmmaking program, figure skating, equestrian, great academics, terrific school spirit and, of course, the radio station.

"Students are the on-air hosts, producers and editors. We are the content creators. Students in all grades participate in the broadcast operations. We also have a communication technology course in radio and audio production, which was developed at Pickering College, which you cannot find anywhere else."

Added Bryce: "It is not just students who are involved. We have an active Board of Directors, an Advisory Council, and many dedicated teachers. Recently, we earned the support of the Community Radio Fund of Canada. Community members air programs on our station and we feature many special events."

In addition to event coverage, students host morning and drive time shows, report news and weather, and share their experiences. They profile businesses, such as the Aurora-based State Farm, and Southlake Regional Health Centre. Others in the community have gotten into the spirit too, including Newmarket artist Dave Peters who hosts local musicians on his radio show "Arts Talk."

The station broadcasts 24/7 with morning, lunch, afternoon and evening programs of up to an hour led by the students, along with the radio shows. When there is not tailored programming on the air, there is always music.

"CHOP teaches young people to achieve excellence in communications," said Bryce, noting their recent installation of technology to provide an emergency broadcast system. "We are committed to building our readership and connecting with our community. We also have plans to increase our signal strength so we can reach a wider geographic area."

So, how does Aurora fit into all this? Sterling explained with a "Call to Action."

"We want you to join us on the air at CHOP-FM," he said. "We want to partner with the Town of Aurora to regularly broadcast the important events and issues in our community. We want you to choose CHOP to communicate with your constituents. We want you, as civic leaders, to partner with us to voice your ideas, your events and your programs on CHOP-FM. We also have remote broadcasting systems so we can come to you. We have worked hard to make CHOP FM a great campus and community radio station and we welcome you to join us on the air."

The pitch was enthusiastically received by Council.

"I think we will absolutely take you up on your offer," said Councillor Sandra Humfries.

Added Councillor Michael Thompson: ?Hopefully it gets referred back to our Communications Manager and we will look for ways in which we can partner with Pickering College.?