

St. Max students shine spotlight on local businesses



By Brock Weir

Tech companies from York Region and the products and services they offer were in the spotlight last week as the Aurora Chamber of Commerce hosted its first-ever Tech Expo; but the spotlight was given a little extra shine on Thursday thanks to students from St. Max and a video camera.

The tech expo was not only a first for the Chamber, but one of the first opportunities film and media students from St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School were able to flex their creative muscles as part of a new partnership between the school department and the chamber.

As the afternoon progressed at King's Riding Golf Club, Grade 12 student Xavier Poblete and Natalia Morales Caceres were wielding cameras and microphones collecting vignettes with each of the business owners and entrepreneurs in attendance.

It's all part of Chamber TV, a new program designed not just to get the word out about Chamber members and what they have to offer, but give students with an interest in film and media a chance to gain practical experience.

"We have an opportunity to actually do some real life production for the community," says Natalia. "It was brought to us by our teacher who also did something with the Chamber of Commerce in the past and we felt we wanted to have that opportunity to work with them again to collaborate and learn what it is like to produce film, be a part of post-production and work with people in the community as well."

Interviewing the vendors alongside the students was the Chamber's own Crystal Walsh, who said the program is a win-win all around.

"It is another opportunity for students to get that real life work experience," says Ms. Walsh. "We have partnered with St. Max on our Chamber Connection videos and we're trying to engage the younger generation in the Chamber. I think if the students and the supervising teacher feel they are gaining valuable experience from this [that is the measure of success]."

"The Chamber is really grateful for the partnership because it is helping us showcase our initiatives as well in a new and interesting format."

Looking over the Tech Expo at the midway point on Thursday, Javed Khan, President of the Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors, said it was shaping up to be a resounding success judging by the constant flow of traffic and the quality of the conversations.

"We have been planning this for at least three years and we wanted an opportunity where we can connect the business community with the consumer community," he said. "Technology is one of the most common questions we hear: 'I am having challenges with servers, I don't know if I am getting the right computer, I don't know.' I would love it if we could be in a room where we would have an opportunity to talk to experts from the information technology area. Now, we're here."

He hailed the partnership with St. Max as "a really strong collaboration" that will be ongoing, noting they would be working together this week on another round of vignettes.

"It is an opportunity for these young, budding professionals to understand that the Chamber network is a big network to help them in

whatever career they want," he said. "For me, the biggest part is for them to get an opportunity to connect with other business owners: future mentors. That was a big segment we were missing."