

VIEW FROM QUEEN'S PARK: Lions Roar

By Chris Ballard, MPP
Newmarket-Aurora

Back in the '60s and '70s my hometown of King City was a pretty quiet place. If you weren't interested in outdoor activities you were out of luck. Especially given these were the days before 200 channel TV and Internet. Thankfully, we had the King City Lions. The group of enthusiastic men – and there were only men in the club in those days – organized a multitude of recreational and social events that gave us kids something to do, and our town a stronger sense of community.

I remember baseball played in the Lions Park, now the King City Memorial Park. (In my day we simply called it 'The Park'.) My father coached for a few years, as did many dads. If I close my eyes I can still smell the cool, damp night air, and hear the thunk of another bat on a ball.

If I recall, the Lions organized baseball, ran the yearly fireworks show, maintained the park, flooded the winter rink, ran a park concession stand, and organized a yearly auction.

The auction – that's where we recycled our bikes.

Anyone whose bike was too small had it donated to the Lions. When the magical auction day arrived, it was a scramble to buy a larger bike. I'm sure the auction sold more than bikes, but that's all I cared about.

There was also the annual Lions Club Oyster Supper fundraiser. Oysters? King City? 1970s? How exotic!

I was thinking about all the positive things the King City Lions Club did for my home town as I was preparing to speak at the Anniversary Dinner for the Aurora Lions, held Saturday at the Legion.

Founded in 1944, the Aurora group is celebrating its 70th year and marked the occasion with a festive dinner, which included guest speaker, Vice District Governor Susan Tate.

Seventy years of contribution to the community is certainly something to be proud of and clearly demonstrates Lion members live up to their motto: 'We Serve.' I am impressed by both what the Aurora Lions have done, and also their international organization. With an astonishing 1.35 million members worldwide, the Lions are global leaders in humanitarianism. I learned there are more than 45,000 Lions clubs in over 206 countries, making Lions the world's largest service club.

A quick bit of calculation tells me that if you visited a different Lions Club each day, it would take you more than 123 years to visit them all.

Here in Aurora, the Lions have been among our volunteer leaders.

There are a number of local Lions projects that stand out for me – the Lion's Park, the original Town Park Band Shell, funding for our public library, the Christmas basket program (still going strong), and who can forget pancakes served with real maple syrup at Shepherd's Bush each spring when the sap was running. (There are plans afoot, I'm told, to bring back that wonderful tradition.)

I was staggered to learn the group sponsors over 500 vision tests for young Aurora school children each year. Vision is a key focus for Lions.

Lions serve. Indeed!

There were two seeing-eye dogs in attendance at the dinner, attending with their charges who are Lions members. Both were wonderfully behaved, beautiful animals. The Lions have been a big part of providing visually challenged people with assistance dogs. It isn't cheap. I heard prices for a well-trained seeing-eye dog range from \$10,000 to \$15,000.

Today's Lions readily admit women to the club and that is reflected in the list of club officers -- about half are women.

The Aurora group is rebuilding itself to meet the challenges of the next 70 years. It meets the second and third Tuesday of each month at the Aurora Canadian Legion, 105 Industrial Parkway North. You can contact president Ra'ed Dallal at raed_dallal@yahoo.ca for information.

Although part of a massive international organization, our local group doesn't get any more grassroots. Thank you to all who serve, and have served, in the group. And thanks to King City Lions, who helped make my childhood a lot more fun.

We've moved.

Our community office has moved to 328 Wellington St., E., Aurora. We're on the second floor of the white building, behind Nino D'Aversa Bakery. It's a fantastic new building and the rent is more affordable.

Our new office is wonderfully accessible. It's on the York Region Transit line and within walking distance of the Aurora GO Station. There is also lots of parking.

Our phone numbers and email remain the same, although we have tweaked our hours to better serve residents: Monday-Wednesday

10 a.m. - 4 p.m.; Thursday 10 a.m. - 6 p.m.; Friday 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Call us at 905-750-0019.

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