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WEEK OF MAY 28 2026



VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION

It was a night of celebration at Aurora Town Square on Monday night as the Town hosted its annual Community Recognition Awards - which culminated in a lifetime achievement award for former Aurora mayor Tim Jones and Doug Steele being named the Town's 2026 Citizen of the Year. (MAIN) Councillors Harold Kim and Michael Thompson, Citizen of the year Steele, Mayor Tom Mrakas, Lifetime Achievement Award-winner Jones, and Councillors Rachel Gilliland, Ron Weese, and Wendy Gaertner cut the celebratory cake. (INSET) All the evening's winners were celebrated on stage. For full coverage of this year's ceremony and its recipients, see Pages 18 - 23. **Auroran photos by Glenn Rodger**



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Doug Steele named Aurora's 2026 Citizen of the Year

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

At a time when food insecurity has left so many wondering where to turn, Doug Steele has been a difference-maker.

The former Executive Director of Welcoming Arms, an ecumenical organization founded to help local community members make ends meet and provide fellowship over a meal, was named

Aurora's 2026 Citizen of the Year on Monday night as part of the Town's annual Community Recognition Awards.

"Tonight, we recognize someone who, for more than two decades, has quietly and consistently made Aurora a more compassionate place to live," said Mayor Tom Mrakas, before revealing the name of this year's honouree. "This individual first began making a significant impact in our community by joining the parent council

at Light of Christ Catholic Elementary School here in Aurora. During his time there, he participated actively and served as Chair for several years, helping guide initiatives that supported students, families, and the broader school community. But just like many of our most celebrated volunteers, this individual's efforts to give back - to improve

Continued on page 18

Victoria Hall area residents push back against commercial use of historic building

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Aurora residents pushed back against a potential commercial future for historic Victoria Hall last week.

Nearly two-dozen people met outside the landmark on the southwest corner of Mosley and Victoria Streets on Thursday evening to advocate for the building's continued use as a community facility

Continued on page 12



Residents held a demonstration outside Victoria Hall on Thursday evening, opposing a commercial future for the local landmark. **Auroran photo by Brock Weir**

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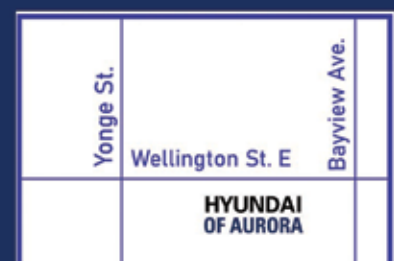
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New addition planned for Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School



Newmarket-Aurora MPP Dawn Gallagher Murphy and Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo joined Ministry and Board representatives at last week's funding announcement at Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School. **Contributed photo**

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

As the new Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School building on Bayview Avenue and Spring Farm nears the end of its first academic year, it's already set to grow

On Friday, the Ministry of Education and Newmarket-Aurora MPP Dawn Gallagher Murphy announced \$8.8 million in Provincial funding for a new addition to the school, which will create 253 new student spaces.

"The funding for the Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School addition in Aurora is great news for our community," said MPP Gallagher Murphy. "Through this investment, we're creating opportunities for students to thrive well into the future."

Added York Region District School Board Chair Ron Lynn: "Safe, modern learning environments are essential to student achievement and wellbeing, and we are grateful to the Ministry of Education for its support in making this rebuild possible. The new building will ensure that Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School continues to deliver high quality learning opportunities to

students in Aurora for many years to come."

Now located at 11 Spring Farm Road, Dr. G.W. Williams opened its new location to students at the start of the 2025-2026 school year, after more than 70 years on Dunning Avenue.

The former Williams building is now being used by the York Region District School Board for other purposes.

Funding for the school's edition is part of a \$1.6 billion Ontario-wide investment in 79 different school construction projects. The Ministry of Education says this, all told, will create nearly 30,000 new student and licensed child care spaces.

"Student success starts with having the right environment to learn," said Minister of Education Paul Calandra in a statement. "We're building the schools students need, and we're making sure they get built quickly and on schedule. With stronger oversight and accountability through the Putting Student Achievement First Act, we are ensuring projects are delivered on time and focused on students, so that parents can be confident their children have the tools and opportunities they need to thrive."

Added Todd McCarthy, Ontario's Acting Minister of Infrastructure, "As part of our government's historic capital plan, we are investing \$236 billion in critical infrastructure to build

and protect Ontario. Through these investments, we are helping deliver new and improved schools across the Province to support students, local jobs, and growing communities."

YRP launches Drone as First Responder Program

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

A drone could be first on the scene at emergencies across the community as the York Regional Police launch a new program.

The Drone as a First Responder will be a six-month pilot program that will see the devices installed at four police stations across York Region.

The YRP stresses the drones will not be used in active patrol, but will instead be deployed in emergency situations.

"With the ability to be activated in seconds and arrive at a scene in minutes, the drones will often be the first responder at the scene, providing the ability for pilots to see what is happening on the ground, and to relay

critical information to dispatchers and attending officers," says Sergeant James Dickson. "This program reflects the commitment of York Regional Police to harness emerging technology and to improve the organization's ability to serve the community. Benefits include faster response times, improved safety, and smarter decision-making capabilities for officers following a call for service."

"The drones will not be used for ongoing patrol; instead, they will be deployed to calls where pilots determine they could be useful. Drones are not used for surveillance and they do not automatically record photos or videos. Instead, the recording functionality must be manually activated by a pilot to capture evidence where appropriate."



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Accessibility needs improvement at GO Station: reader

Sunday, May 24, was the beginning of National AccessAbility Week and I would like to point out that for the past two or more years (it seems like more) the accessibility entrance to the GO train has been closed.

This entrance was through the parking lot directly off Metcalfe Avenue and put the commuters at the raised platform giving easy access onto the GO train for anyone in a wheelchair.

Once this accessible entrance was closed it became difficult and frustrating for anyone with mobility issues. It has added a great deal of extra time to make the additional trek of 2 to 6 blocks to now get to this ramp onto the train.

This does not sound like a lot to able bodied people but try doing this in the winter when sidewalks are covered in snow and ice or in the extreme heat of the summer with a wheelchair, crutches or prosthetic limbs.

Everyone deserves easy access to public transit but this shut down of the same for years now is more than an inconvenience, it is a human rights issue.

Looking at where the entrance used to be, at the far end of the parking lot away from Wellington Street it would have been so easy to create a small pathway using fencing to access the platform.

It appears no one took mobility issues into account when construction began.

How much longer will this go on?

Donna Frey
Aurora

Region pays tribute to PSWs

On behalf of York Regional Council and The Regional Municipality of York, I'm pleased to recognize Personal Support Worker Day on Tuesday, May 19, 2026, and extend our sincere appreciation to Personal Support Workers across our communities.

Personal Support Workers (PSWs) are an essential part of our community health care system. In long-term care homes, retirement homes, hospitals and private residences across York Region, PSWs provide vital, hands-on support that help residents live with dignity, safety and independence. Their work is deeply personal, often involving assistance with daily living activities such as bathing, dressing, mobility support, meal assistance and medication reminders, as well as offering comfort, companionship and emotional reassurance.

The impact of this work extends well beyond physical care. PSWs are often a steady presence in moments of vulnerability and transition, building trusted relationships with residents and families. They bring patience, empathy and professionalism into every interaction, helping to ease isolation and improve quality of life for some of our most vulnerable residents.

We also recognize this work is not without its challenges. PSWs consistently demonstrate resilience and dedication in demanding environments, while continuing to provide compassionate, person-centred care. Their commitment helps strengthen our broader health care system and supports better outcomes for individuals and families across York Region.

On this day, we thank all Personal Support Workers for the important role you play in our communities. Your care, compassion and commitment make a meaningful difference every day and York Region is deeply grateful for your service.

Eric Jolliffe
York Region Chairman and CEO

Machell's Corners



Superpowers and Full Circle Moments

If you could pick one superpower, just one out of an entire menu, one that's only limited to the barriers of your own imagination, what would you pick?

While a magic wand to wave in a new era of world peace and usher in a reality where everybody is fed and nobody is unhoused would be the ideal, superpowers aren't necessarily required to achieve those goals; just equity, effort, determination and collaboration, albeit in a scale that can often be hard to fathom.

It doesn't take superpowers, just existing power pointed in the right direction.

No, I'm talking about the powers that are truly out of this world.

Maybe it's the power to take to the skies and fly like a bird, or the ability to teleport at will to wherever you want in the blink of an eye. Perhaps its super-human strength to save someone from a perilous situation, the ability to move with the speed of lightning, or even x-ray vision to see beyond what was previously impenetrable.

While the ability to fly, teleport, or get things done in a fraction of the time would be pretty cool, I've always had the same answer: time travel.

I'm not sure when the very concept of time travel first captured my imagination, but it's been there for as long as I can remember. Being able to bear witness to pivotal moments in our collective history, however large or small the incident, and see what really happened versus the generally accepted narrative has always been intriguing – after all, history is almost invariably written by the victors.

But it doesn't have to be the big stuff.

Growing up in Newmarket, the first house I called home was one of about two dozen built on former farmland in the equally former village of Bogartown, and there were some remnants of the agricultural operation that was 20, 50, 100 years before a going concern – if you knew where to look. I always tried to imagine what the farm looked like when it was in full swing, the people who worked the land, and the impact it might have had on the surrounding area.

This fascination didn't subside when we moved.

With my mom, we moved westward in Newmarket to a newer subdivision in the former village of Armitage – and, at that time, there were actually some landmarks, since demolished or moved, that were part of one of this area's most bustling early settlements. With my dad, we eventually moved to a pre-Victorian home with a woman's tombstone in the



BROCK'S BANTER

Brock Weir

back yard. As you can imagine, both provided no shortage of fuel for my imagination.

Eventually, I learned there were these groovy places called museums that one could go and actually learn about all this and more – with no time travel required, no matter how cool that might be.

It didn't take much time to exhaust Newmarket's Elman W. Campbell Museum as my school was only a short walk away and a regular destination for field trips, so I eventually turned southward to Aurora.

There, on the second floor behind the honey-hued walls of the historic Church Street School, was the Aurora Museum. I'd been to that building once before to pick up my Beavers uniform, but had no idea there was a bustling museum upstairs – but, once this revelation was, well, revealed, I had to see what it was all about.

My mom and I made the short trip one weekend and I tried to take everything in like a sponge. Amid the artefacts on the walls and in display cases were recreated scenes of what life of yore was like, and this rather static history was soon brought to life by curator Jacqueline Stuart who had the unique ability to make an otherwise mundane school desk as interesting as a war relic.

This experience played no small part in stoking a love of history, whether it's history around the corner or around the world.

On Monday, I was back behind those honey-hued walls of the Church Street School, which now forms the historic heart of the Aurora Town Square complex. While the Aurora Museum remains a vital component of the whole, albeit in a much smaller configuration compared to my first visit, the building has evolved, changed, and grown over time.

Things may have changed, but Monday night's Community

Recognition Awards offered something of a full circle moment.

There, a few steps away from the former museum space, I was once again with my mother and, once again, with the lovely Jackie Stuart, more than 30 years after I first crossed that threshold.

I was honoured to be on hand not just to cover the event itself for our newspapers, but to also receive the Community Leadership Award, while Stuart received the Town of Aurora's Heritage Award – an annual award I was surprised to learn has not caused Jackie to have to invest in a second mantle to hold 'em all. Long overdue!

The Community Recognition Awards is always one of my favourite events of the year. Not only does it give this writer a chance to shine a further light on the people that make communities like ours tick, but in a world that can often feel increasingly dispiriting and challenging, there's nothing quite as encouraging as learning about the wonderful things people do to give back and make the world around them, local or further afield, that much better.

It's hard to leave the event without feeling like you have a bit of extra wind in your sails and inspired to take on whatever lies ahead.

Truth be told, however, after covering this event each year for almost 15 years in various capacities, this year's ceremony was decidedly different as I was actually on the receiving end of one of these things and on the other side of the camera. In fact, being on the "other side" for a change was remarked upon more than once in the evening.

But no matter how odd it felt, it was truly an honour to be, as the Town of Aurora's slogan suggests, in the best of company.

Being in this job, many of the evening's honourees were already familiar to me, and I've had the privilege of writing about the good they do before – but there were plenty more whom I was able to meet for the first time, and learn more about what drives them to make a difference.

These community superheroes are driven by a passion to make a difference rather than any superpower, and that's always worth a reminder.

It was a wonderful evening, and one that left me even more buoyed than it usually does, and I thank those who nominated me for the award and to everyone at the Town who came together to truly put on a night to remember.

And, for this historian-at-heart, helping make that 30-plus-years-in-the-making full-circle moment possible.

THE AURORAN

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BY DAVID SUZUKI

Don't throw that home away!

Ours is a throw-away culture. That even applies to houses. When homes or buildings are demolished to make way for a road, condo development or another house or building, the materials and contents are usually sent to the landfill. As with other characteristics of our consumer-driven societies, it's wrong.

Many components — wood, concrete, bricks, metal, plastic, vinyl — can be reused, repurposed or recycled. It's not a new idea, but it hasn't taken off the way it should. In many jurisdictions, people have been able to apply for salvage rights, allowing them to take useful items from a home or structure slated for demolition. And “deconstruction” companies have been around for a while, but they're the exception rather than the rule.

In some cases, entire houses are moved to another location and fixed up rather than being demolished. Vancouver circular construction think tank Light House estimates about 20 per cent of demolished homes here could have been moved and another 60 per cent could have been deconstructed, with materials reused or recycled.

Some municipalities are finally seeing the value in keeping materials out of landfills, implementing bylaw and regulation changes to encourage salvaging and recycling. It's about time!

Vancouver has some rules around recycling materials from house demolitions, depending on the age and character of the home, and offers a “Construction and Demolition Waste Toolkit.” As a Tyee article reports, population growth in Vancouver meant tearing down 7,100 single-family homes from 2012 to 2023 and about 2,700 every year in the larger Metro Vancouver region to make way for multiplex housing such as highrise towers. About one-third of Metro Vancouver's landfill is from construction and demolition.

The problem isn't just the waste of good materials. A 2025 Australian study notes that disposing of construction and demolition waste in landfills “has been widely recognized as a source of leachate, containing toxic contaminants, which pose significant environmental risks.”

And the building and construction sector accounts for about 37 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions, with close to one-third of that from the energy used to produce materials for a building.

According to the CBC, “Replacing one building with another generates an entire building's worth of emissions, which means that, from a climate perspective, it's better to extend the lifetime of those materials and reuse them than discard them.”

The Tyee article highlights a Vancouver company, Vema Deconstruction, that claims to have saved from 135,000 to 225,000 kilograms of construction materials since its founding in 2022. It's not just buildings that can be recycled. The Patullo Bridge that connected New Westminster and Surrey across the Fraser River was recently replaced, and steel, asphalt and concrete from the old bridge will be recycled.

Diverting construction materials has many benefits. As the City of Vancouver notes, “Recycling and reusing building materials has cost-saving incentives, saves trees, conserves landfill space, reduces greenhouse gas emissions, and supports affordable housing.”

Reclaiming wood is especially beneficial. It means no trees have to be cut down, leaving them to sequester climate-altering carbon dioxide, and for the numerous other benefits trees, especially old-growth, provide. The retained or reused wood continues to store carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases — when wood decomposes, it emits methane, a potent greenhouse gas. And it can cost less than cutting, transporting and processing timber.

Of course, deconstructing a home takes longer and usually costs more than demolishing and carting it to the landfill.

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The Gen-Z Stare

These two unidentified young women were photographed at Robert Newbery's studio on Yonge Street, sometime between 1875-1880. The photo itself (76.12.82) is a thin and somewhat non-standard Carte de Visite, which was a popular format for portraits that could be exchanged with friends. Now, we figure these two women are too stylish and cool to show that uneasiness shown by many early photo subjects, and they're more likely exhibiting an early kind of “Gen-Z Stare”, probably wishing that Mr. Newbery would take the photo and move on!



PARSA'S PERSPECTIVE

 Michael Parsa, MPP
 Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill

and I know many people will be taking part in local celebrations and highlighting the importance of ensuring everyone in the community feels respected and supported.

With summer just around the

I wanted to connect as we head into summer and all the great opportunities June offers to reflect on and celebrate culture, heritage, family, and community.

June marks National Indigenous History Month. And on June 21, National Indigenous Peoples Day is a meaningful opportunity to recognize and reflect on the diverse cultures and contributions of Indigenous peoples across the country.

June also marks Pride Month,

Every single day, across our community and right across Canada, families are being stretched to their absolute breaking point. The rising cost of living is a painful reality being felt directly at the gas pumps. Hardworking families are pulling up to gas stations and wincing as they watch the digital dials soar upward rapidly, draining their hard-earned take-home pay just so they can drive to work, drop their children off at recreational facilities, or run basic errands. Life has simply become unaffordable, and it is getting significantly worse.

The primary driver of these astronomical prices is not a mystery, it is the sheer weight of government taxation. When you look closely at what you are paying for at the pump, a massive portion of the cost per litre is comprised of layers upon layers of taxes. We have the federal excise tax, the regular GST, the clean fuel standard, and, on top of all that, a punishing federal industrial carbon tax that is driving up the cost of energy production. This is a system of tax-on-tax compounding that punishes everyday people. Canadians are being gouged by their own government every single time they fill up their vehicles.

To understand just how many taxes are now on the fuel you buy, we only need to look at the historical data. In 2014, global crude oil prices were as high or higher than they are today, yet gas prices at Canadian pumps were approximately 45 cents lower per litre. This data clearly demonstrates that today's record-high retail prices are not merely the result of only global energy supply

chains or international pressures. The domestic price gap is driven by domestic policy decisions. New regulatory burdens and escalating taxes implemented over the last decade are driving fuel costs higher.

My Conservative colleagues and I have been clear: Canadians need immediate, substantial relief, not the weak, temporary half-measures this government has put forward. We are pushing the government to completely axe all federal taxes on fuel for the entire year. This would equal approximately 25 cents in savings per litre. Minor government tweaks won't fix the deep financial pain families are experiencing. Suspending these taxes until the end of the year would give household budgets real breathing room.

Fuel costs being high, increases the cost of absolutely everything in our economy. Every single product on a store shelf got there because a truck, train, plane, or ship moved it. When diesel and gasoline prices skyrocket, transportation companies are forced to pass those expenses down the supply chain. This means higher

corner and warmer days ahead, I hope everyone has a chance to get outdoors, spend time with loved ones, and enjoy the local events happening across the community.

And please take some time to appreciate the fathers, grandfathers, mentors, and all the father figures who provide guidance and unwavering support to the people around them. I wish you all a wonderful start to summer. Happy Father's Day.



COSTAS' CORNER

 MP Costas Menegakis
 Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill

costs for manufacturing, higher costs for building materials, and, most critically, higher costs for food. Those high costs get passed down to the end consumer. The price of fuel drives grocery inflation. We cannot afford more of it at a time when Canada has the worst grocery inflation among all G7 countries.

Prime Minister Mark Carney purports to be an economist. Canadians never expected that he would continue the failed economic policies of his predecessor Justin Trudeau. In fact, in Carney's first year, his Liberal Government has produced the worst annual deficit of any Canadian Government in the history of our country, outside of COVID. He and his government are simply out of touch with the harsh realities facing families in Aurora and Richmond Hill.

You deserve a government that respects the value of your hard-earned dollars. The current high fuel tax approach is completely unsustainable, especially now that April's inflation rate has hit a two-year high. This isn't an accident, it is a direct result of increasing taxes over the last decade that has made everything more expensive. If we continue down this path of relentless taxation, the cost of everything will keep climbing at a time when families are already very stretched. Canadians cannot afford any more.

As your Member of Parliament, you, your families and your businesses are my number one priority. I will continue to advocate for policies that are sensible and that can provide real relief for the residents of our community.

Parking concerns, access to SARC remain worries surrounding Wellington Street development plan

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Plans for a housing development on Wellington Street East, just a stone's throw from the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex, are set to be discussed at Council this week amid ongoing concerns over a lack of parking and making the SARC's driveway an access point.

Zoning amendments for 1425 and 1452 Wellington Street are on

Council's agenda this week after being discussed earlier this month at the Committee level.

At issue is the plan for 74 townhouses, 32 of which are back-to-back units, with access onto Wellington Street East and the SARC.

The proposal allows for units with 1-car and potentially 2-car garages, but the lack of formal driveways and on-street parking has been a concern for residents and Council members

alike, as has the plan to offer just 14 visitor parking spaces and access to the SARC parking lot.

While staff have advised Council they have no concerns with the SARC access "in principle," local lawmakers have shared residents' worries that this will not only result in parking spillover into the Complex area, but create a liability issue for the Town if the driveway becomes a thru-road.

"I urge Council to please take a proactive look ahead to the outcome of this development and weigh the cost and benefits of this proposed development as it is being presented here today," said resident Lita Dayfoot, noting concerns over road configurations, lack of parking within the development area, and access to the SARC, which she said "poses a number of issues and hurdles for a townhouse division this size."

"Sixteen proposed townhouses have no driveway, just a garage that goes directly onto the street. 16 units will only have garage parking. There's no parking on the street. Will they be using the 16 guest parking spaces?"

These questions were shared by Council members, including Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese who requested traffic study information come forward to this week's meeting looking at weekend use, and what work has been done to this point on

further traffic signals at the SARC.

Marco Ramunno, Aurora's Director of Planning, said conditions would be made where the intersection signalization would be required with the property owners sharing the cost of installation.

Parking was also a concern for Ward 4 Councillor Michael Thompson, who said while the proposal might meet municipal standards on paper, the reality could prove a different story.

"I think you only have to look around Town to get a good sense of how many cars are at people's townhouses," he said. "It's great that they're going to help pay for the traffic signal lights at the intersection, but, again, it comes back to the whole conversation [which] is that they need access into the SARC. Is this really good planning? If it is not good planning, are we really getting enough benefit for the community to allow this?"

These worries were echoed by Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner, who said traffic in the SARC parking lot has only increased since the Town opened a full-size gymnasium at the Complex.

"There is a lot going on at the SARC. That parking lot, that road, are extremely busy. We need the parking, especially as we've got a new gym. We want to do sports tourism," she said. "We just cannot allow this residential parking to come into the SARC parking area. We have to do what's best for our residents."

"I'm not going to vote in favour of this. I don't think it's appropriate."

One positive, she noted, was potentially redesignating the SARC driveway as a "highway" in the municipal sense of the word to take some of the liability off the Town should there be an issue.

"If the property is a parking lot then it is not covered under the Municipal Act for limited liability to the Town," said Town Solicitor Patricia De Sario. "If it is considered private property, and if somebody would fall or would there be an accident or something on the property, it would be considered under the Occupiers Liability Act and the Town as owner would have to provide a defence of the property. If the Town actually dedicates it as a public highway, there are mechanisms in the municipal act that provide the municipalities with the defence."


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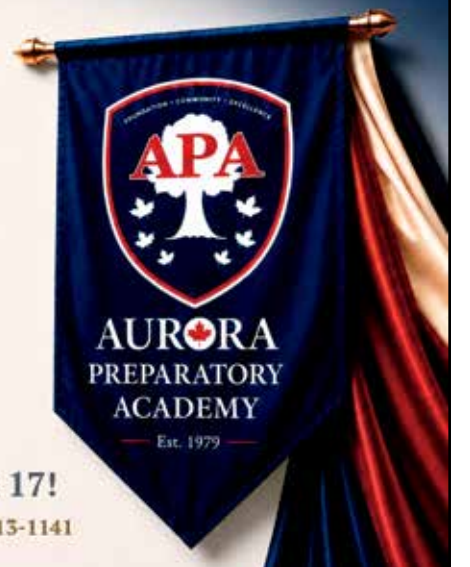
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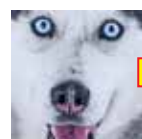


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Arts & Culture

Unearthed showcases abstract inspiration found in the natural world



Artist Jing Fu, second from right, was celebrated by the Aurora Cultural Centre's Adora Lau, Ashlyn Gregory, and Suzanne Haines at the opening of "Unearthed - My Equilibrium."

Auroran photo by Brock Weir

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BY BROCK WEIR
 EDITOR
 LOCAL JOURNALISM
 INITIATIVE REPORTER

Artist Jing Fu has always found inspiration in nature.

The Shanghai-born Canadian artist recently felt her creativity flowing when she pieced together and painted discarded tree branches into a new sculptural work – not knowing that as soon as the piece was installed at the Aurora Cultural Centre last week as part of her new exhibition, Unearthed – My Equilibrium, that it would suddenly start sprouting leaves in the Homeroom Galleries, a potent symbol of rebirth.

Unearthed – My Equilibrium was formally opened at the Aurora Cultural Centre on May 14, and is set to run through August 13 – and how long the leaves will run is anyone's guess!

“Unearthed – My Equilibrium presents Jing Fu’s atmospheric landscapes in conversation with her ongoing explorations in abstraction,” says the Aurora Cultural Centre. “Informed by her training in shan shui (literally translated as ‘mountains and water’ paintings), the works on display balance Eastern aesthetics with local influences. Since immigrating to Canada from urban Shanghai more than twenty years ago, Fu’s close observations of southern Ontario’s natural environments have become central to her practice. A frequent hiker and prolific painter, she expertly translates her meditations on the natural world onto canvas.

“If Fu’s landscapes evoke the opposing yet harmonious forces of nature on a grand scale, her Roots series turns inward, offering a more intimate exploration of nature’s symbolism and symmetry. Through bold brushstrokes and richly layered textures, she conveys the strength of the gnarled tree roots, while the finely rendered details reveal the delicacy of the intricate root networks beneath our feet. Together,

these two bodies of work reflect her pursuit of both internal and artistic balance as she moves fluidly between Eastern and Western visual languages.”

Welcoming friends, family, and art-lovers to the opening reception, Fu said it was a “true honour” to share her work at the Cultural Centre.

“[This exhibition] represents the search for roots and balance. In this work, I explore the harmony between the love for the traditional arts, traditional Chinese painting, and my passion for modern art,” she said. “I want to give a big special thank you to the gallery manager, curator Ashlyn Gregory, gallery coordinator Adora Lau – thank you both for your incredible hard work for making this show happen. Also, thank you to my family and friends for supporting me here and making me feel like I want to continue my work.”

In turn, Gregory said the show itself was an “extension” of the idea of the pursuit of balance, and touched upon the unexpected symbol of rebirth at the heart of the show.

“As you make your way through the galleries, I encourage you to think about balance not as a final destination, but as an ongoing process,” she said. “In addition to her paintings, Jing presents a new series of sculptures that celebrate nature and rebirth. These sculptures give physical form to the concepts explored in her paintings and stem from her deep appreciation of the natural world.

“If you look closely, you’ll discover that the sculpture in this room is actually growing real leaves, which is fitting as the name of the sculpture is ‘Rebirth.’ This was not planned or something we had anticipated; it’s just a happy accident. It really connects to the themes of the exhibition, and we’re going to see how it continues to grow throughout the course of the exhibition.”



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Generations of area family impacted, supported by Alzheimer Society

De Farias named Honourary Family for Saturday's Walk for Alzheimers

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

After Elizabeth De Faria's grandmother began showing signs of memory loss after a bad fall, she and her family didn't know in which direction to turn.

As her grandmother's needs became greater, their list of questions became longer, and eventually they found a vital lifeline in the Alzheimer Society of York Region.

Then based in Newmarket, De Faria describes this first connection with the Society as "like a miracle" as they navigated these difficult waters.

These waters only became choppy when, in the years following her grandmother's passing, De Faria's own parents became afflicted by different forms of dementia – and, as they have in the past, the Alzheimer Society of York Region has once again been that lifeline.

De Faria and her family are set to return the support this weekend as the Society hosts the 2026 IG Wealth Management Walk for Alzheimer's on Saturday, May 30, at Lake Wilcox Park in Richmond Hill.

This year marks the 40th anniversary of the Alzheimer Society of York Region and, in a sense, De Faria has been with them every step of the way.

"Nearly 40 years ago, we began our journey with the Alzheimer Society of York Region, and we are still utilizing and cherishing their invaluable help today," she says. "The Alzheimer Society of York Region has helped our family when we needed it most. Staff at AS York are the experts. They know how you feel when no one else does. Because of that, you feel instant comfort and have a new calm, knowing



The De Faria Family will take a lead role in this week's IG Wealth Management Walk for Alzheimers.

Photo courtesy of the Alzheimer Society of York Region

you are no longer alone. They are with you every step of the way."

With just days to go before the community laces up for the cause, De Faria said she was a bit trepidatious of sharing her story in front of the crowd, but knew it was important to build awareness of the myriad programs and supports AS York offers to individuals and families in need.

Looking back on her own family's journey with the organization, she cites their day program as just one example of a vital service that will be supported by the funds raised this weekend.

"My grandmother started going to the day group and it was like a door opened up for my mom, especially at that time. She

was the main caregiver, so she actually had a little bit of room to breathe, to think. There were all those kids at home and my dad – it was tremendous, not just for my grandmother, but really for the caregivers. Nowadays, there's a tremendous amount more supports. It's mind-boggling when I go on the website and see all the paths, programs and people you can connect with – and social workers that can help you."

The multitude of pathways have been very helpful to the De Faria family as their needs have become more complex with her mother now in the later stages of dementia herself and her father diagnosed with the rare supranuclear palsy.

"My mom and I were teammates," she says of caring for her grandmother and father, and taking things in turns. "When my mother got sick [during COVID], I was like, 'Okay, who is going to help me? Who's my team? I don't have one anymore.' That was pretty devastating. In [AS York] I had absolutely amazing people who were really passionate, who really loved what they were doing – very compassionate people. To have somebody on the other end of the phone who knows, who can just listen, and try to direct you on what you should do, what you could do, what they can offer during the COVID time, was very helpful.

"Last year, I thought, my God, all the stuff they've done for us, all the situations that, when we needed their help the most, they're the people who have pulled us through, every single time, and I have to give back. When I went to last year's Walk, it was so powerful, so emotional, I burst into tears. It just felt so good to be doing something to give back, to raise awareness, to tell other people, 'Hey, don't feel alone. Don't hide in the darkness. These people are really the ones you need to talk to.'

"I've seen the immense growth of AS York and the immense support and that' because of the people they have, the people who have done fundraising, and my message is strength, togetherness, and to not feel alone, to not be afraid to talk about it, but come out and use the strength of other people to help you get through it. There's so much help that comes from that."

For more information on this year's Walk, including how to register as an individual or team, or to support others, visit alzheimer.ca/york/en/2026IGWalk.

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BUSINESS & FINANCE



Victoria Hall area residents push back against commercial use of historic building

From page 1

rather than any future commercial uses – particularly a restaurant.

The demonstration came on the heels of Council approving confidential staff recommendations on a potential lease agreement for the building last week, and ahead of Council’s formal approval of a \$2.2 million renovation plan.

Those who attended the rally last week spoke out not only against the potential of future use of Victoria Hall but also what they said was a lack of transparency regarding the renovations.

“It’s a historic building, that is no question, and we would like to see it preserved – but see it preserved for the community of this area, actually for the whole Town,” said resident Sarah Hartman. “We don’t need or even want another restaurant. There’s enough issues with the restaurant that is just up the street, [including] parking.”

Hartman said it was “unfortunate” that nothing was going on in the nearby Performance Hall at Aurora Town Square that evening as it would have underscored how parking is at a premium in the area.

Nearby resident S. Morton-Leonard also cited issues with Slabtown Armoury, the restaurant that holds a lease on the municipally-owned Aurora Armoury space.



Local residents gathered at Victoria Hall on Thursday evening to make their feelings clear on the future use of the historic building.

Auroran photo by Brock Weir

“Slabtown is still in its honeymoon phase. My kids have all been in the restaurant industry and the longevity is not great. We’re going into a recession – do we need two?” she asked. “This renovation needs to happen, but minus a commercial kitchen. That may bring that ticket price down. This should have been done at the same time as Aurora Town Square, and I certainly spoke up at that point. Victoria Hall has

always been a civic building. It needs to continue to be a civic building.”

This was a view shared by Tim Hall who said it “makes no sense” the Town would put Victoria Hall into the hands of a for-profit business.

“We should not [renovate it for a commercial tenant] on the taxpayers’ dime,” he said. “That’s not what our municipal government is for.”

Morton-Leonard said she hoped Victoria Hall and its future will become a municipal election issue this fall, a sentiment that was shared by declared candidates who attended the rally in support of residents.

“When you’re spending this kind of money, people’s hard-earned tax dollars and having this kind of outcry that [residents] are not informed, they don’t know, never really been given a good explanation of why it jumped from \$500,000 - \$2.1 million – where did we get it so wrong and what’s the process to fix that error so we’re not so far off?” said Ward 5 Councillor and mayoral candidate John Gallo.

Gallo said full disclosure of all documents related to the Victoria Hall renovation project, particularly the Class D estimate, would have “helped the community understand the ticket price” and “maybe it would have alleviated some concerns.”

Ward 1 Council candidate Rocco Morsillo noted the residents “have been really loud and clear” they don’t want a restaurant in Victoria Hall and the renovation should not be for a commercial use.

“We want to see it remaining as a community space, like it has always been,” he said. “We don’t need another commercial establishment here. We want to have Victoria Hall refurbished according to what the Heritage Committee wants in terms of design, and use it as a community space.”

“I don’t believe the Town should be leasers that are supposed to be making money. The Town’s purpose is to be creating spaces for the residents, not making money. If you had to make money with a \$2.2 million spend, it’s going to take 80 years to get that back at a lease rate in this building to a commercial unit. Let’s renovate it to a standard that’s suitable to the Heritage Committee, which would be a lot less than \$2.2 million, and let’s bring it back as a community space.”

Looking over the scene, incumbent Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese said it was “less than a protest than just to get together and have some collegial talk about what the use of this facility should be.”

He said the role of the municipality when it comes to heritage buildings is to be their stewards.

“Stewardship, to me, implies that we maintain these buildings, we keep them with a heritage purpose...and heritage purposes are not necessarily commercial. Heritage purposes, they will support the community, so this could be a variety of things that are not necessarily commercial in nature,” he said. “It should be a community benefit.”

“The residents in this area and the Town Park Community Association are in favour of supporting the Heritage Advisory Committee and their recommendations about the renovations here. I value the Heritage Advisory Committee, I value the volunteer participation that all of our advisory committees have, so when we see them opposing something like this, you have to take notes. I remain hopeful that with the amount of attention this has had...that perhaps this is so close with a 4 – 3 vote, there may be one vote that is flipped one way. If that’s the case, then we’ve got a different scenario ahead.”

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Lions Club gearing up to go to the dogs ahead of weekend fundraising walk

Walk for Dog Guides helps Canadians in need



The Lions International flag was raised at Town Hall on Monday ahead of this weekend's Walk for Dog Guides, a cause very close to the Lions' hearts.

Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

The Aurora Lions Club is getting ready to lace up this weekend and help Canadians living with vision loss, epilepsy, autism and more get a helping hand as they host the annual Walk for Dog Guides.

The Pet Valu Walk for Dog Guides, hosted by the Aurora Lions, will take place at Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park and the Aurora Community Arboretum this Sunday, May 31.

A cause very close to the hearts of Lions across the country, the Aurora club is hard at work to make this walk one to remember and bring out more than 100 participants to walk for those who need a four-legged guide.

Each dog guide, whether they are trained to help the visually impaired, those living with epilepsy, and more, can cost upwards of \$35,000 to train – and, in this walk, every step counts.

The Walk for Dog Guides is now in its 41st year.

Initially founded to support the Canine Vision Canada program, it's a cause that

grown to encompass dog guides trained to respond to vision and hearing challenges, seizure response, diabetes alert, autism assistance, and more.

This year's Walk will take place Sunday with registration beginning at Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park at 10 a.m., before participants set out for the 2km walk in the nearby Arboretum.

Event chair Trudy Stunden says she and the Committee have been hard at work to make this event bigger than ever, with a scavenger hunt and other activations taking place throughout and along the Arboretum route, with further fun planned back at the Park after the event.

Fire and Police Services, for instance, will be at the Park to offer some interactive experiences, and vendors will be on hand offering everything from custom leashes, to dog sitting and grooming services, behavioural training, and even environmentally friendly options for disposing of dog poop.

Some of the participating vendors were on hand at last year's event and Stunden says they were so impressed with what they saw, and what the Lions were doing,

that they asked to "come on board the Committee and help expand the walk."

"We used to do the walk at Shepherd's Bush for many, many years, and it's not that very good for accessibility with the Walk anymore, so we came up with the idea of Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park with the Walk actually in the Arboretum," says Stunden. "We start off at the park and we have a full schedule planned. Then, at 11, we walk across the Arboretum for the 2km walk, and back to the park for pizza, drinks, and prizes. It's a lovely walk and everybody who walks seems to enjoy it – and we're really trying to expand it as a family event."

In addition to the vendors, participants will have a chance to meet two such guide dogs – and their humans – who will be able to drive home how important each step is in assisting Canadians who need canine care.

This importance is not lost on Stunden who says when she first became involved in the walk, she was so interested in the program she visited their training facility in Oakville.

"I was totally amazed," she shares. "I met with a woman who had a child [on

the autism spectrum] and she told me he didn't sleep at night, and when they line up at the grocery store he flights. They got the service dog and it changed their life. It sleeps with him all night long. When they go to the grocery store, they tether the dog to the child and when he goes to flight, the dog will lay down and the child follows the dog's responses, which calms him down. It was amazing.

"I met another woman there who had her sixth foster dog [before it goes back for training]. I said I don't think I could return a dog after the year and she said, 'I cried with my first one, but then, when you come and get invited back to see the dog matched with their person and you see what the dog is going to do for them, I was in and I'm on my sixth foster.' They match it, the recipients come to the facility for three to six weeks and work with the dog that is picked for them to make sure it's a match – and from that alone I wanted to become involved."

To become involved yourself, take part in Sunday's walk, or sponsor a registered participant, visit www.walkfordogguides.com/fundraiser/AuroraONWalkforDogGuides.

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Local youth aim to engage community with Teen Beach Party

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Despite the unseasonably cool weather, beach season is just around the corner, and local youth are looking to make the most of it.

Aurora's Youth Engagement Committee (YEC) is hard at work putting the finishing touches on one of its most anticipated annual events, the Teen Beach Party, set to take over the Aurora Family Leisure Complex on June 25.

National Youth Week 2026 might be in the books, but the Town's YEC is not resting on their laurels. It's full speed ahead on this annual end-of-school celebration and planning for the future.

Aurora's YEC is a group of 13 local youth from across the community who meet biweekly to look at issues facing residents between the ages of 12 and 17 through initiatives and events that "enrich the lives and experiences of young people in the community."

The YEC has its roots in a Youth Advisory Committee that served Aurora between 1995 and 2007. After an absence of nearly seven years, area teens came together to fill the gap and presented their idea of a revival in 2014.

"They made a strong case for bringing back a dedicated youth committee and

they ultimately succeeded," said YEC member Serena Yogaraj "As a result, the Youth Engagement Committee was born. Since then, the YEC has helped launch new events, supported The Loft, and ensured youth voices are an important part of local conversations."

Yogaraj was one of six YEC members to present to Council at this month's Committee of the Whole meeting.

Speaking to the current term of the YEC, member Rhea Manek said they have had "some amazing successes" over the last few months.

"At the beginning of the year, we hosted the Youth Volunteer Fair at the Aurora Public Library with over 100 attendees," she said. "Besides that, we hosted the Haunted Forest, a holiday movie karaoke night and some youth week events such as cake decorating and a live music night. One of our favourite moments though was redecorating The Loft to be a more fun, colourful space with art, music, and games. It's become the perfect spot for us to host events."

The upcoming Teen Beach Party is just one event YEC member Lia Mueller says will help the group "grow and thrive."

"In previous years, this event has brought youth together from across Aurora for an evening filled with energy, connection, and community spirit," she said. "Through

activities such as beach volleyball, dunk tanks, watermelon eating contests, and many other interactive summer games, the Teen Beach Party has become a space for young people to come together, have fun, and create lasting memories. More importantly, events like these reflect the YEC's ongoing commitment to creating inclusive, welcoming, and safe spaces for all youth in Aurora.

"We strive to ensure that every young person feels seen, supported, and encouraged to participate. By continuing to offer events like the Teen Beach Party, we hope to strengthen community connections, encourage youth involvement, and provide opportunities for young people to build confidence, friendships, and a true sense of belonging within our Town."

As they look to the future, the YEC hopes to expand its tent, said Grace Vrabel, who added, they want to bring together similar youth councils from across York Region to share ideas and explore how their events can be "more successful and inclusive."

"Serving on the Youth Engagement Committee as co-president this year, alongside many dedicated changemakers, I have been able to grow as a leader and learn to advocate empathetically for the youth of our Town," said Iman Chaudary. "This year, I joined YEC, just like many of the others on the Council, seeking to make

a concrete difference within my Town and to give back to a community that had already given me so much. This year, we all did just that. Every YEC meeting championed within us something larger. It presented within each and every one of us a purpose. Through YEC... I have learned to give my voice power and to reshape it into actions. From advocating for youth leadership to pushing the boundaries of equity and inclusion, YEC has truly had the chance to build a stronger community within the Town of Aurora, founded on the principles of youth empowerment.

"Our message to every young person in Aurora is incredibly clear. You are not only the leaders of tomorrow, but you are the changemakers of today. Our Town has grown tremendously because of every one of you, and so the Youth Engagement Committee is your chance to broaden your impact."



ROAD RALLY PIT STOP

The Optimist Club of Aurora held their annual Road Rally on Saturday, which saw teams fan out to various locations throughout Aurora, Newmarket, Stouffville, and Richmond Hill - all raising money for the club's youth programs. Among the destinations on participants' checklist was John Abel Park and its evocative wood carvings, as discovered here by members Brian, Dianne, Diane, and Robin.

Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger

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WEEK OF MAY 28 2026

Aurora's Charisma Toupin wins Gold Medal at Karate Canada National Championships in Alberta



The Gold Medal form of Canadian Junior Karate Champion Charisma Toupin in Edmonton.

Photo by Charity dela Cruz-Toupin

BY JIM STEWART

Aurora resident Charisma Toupin captured the gold medal in Cadets Female Kata at the Karate Canada National Championships last week in Edmonton, AB.

Toupin, representing Northern Karate School Aurora, defeated the reigning WKF K1 World Youth Champion Ella Nishida to win the national title on May 17.

The Grade 9 student at Ecole Secondaire Catholique Renaissance reflected on the moment when she defeated Nishida: "Right after I won, I looked out at my parents, coaches, friends, and teammates from the dojo—so many people that have all helped me along the way."

The appreciative 15-year-old discussed the satisfaction of winning gold after years of dedication, sacrifice, and perseverance which included a silver medal at the 2024 Karate Canada Nationals and a bronze medal at the 2025 Karate Canada Nationals.

"I felt proud in that moment—I felt that my hard work had paid off."

The road ahead for Toupin is clear and her plan includes representing Team Canada internationally for the second time at the Junior Pan-American Championships in Costa Rica this summer.

She discussed the impact of winning the Canadian championship as it relates to the upcoming Junior Pan-Ams.

"It's given me confidence after finishing first at the nationals. It's motivated me to work harder—to keep training so I can be more explosive and faster and to take up running so I can build stamina. It's pushing me to medal for the first time at the Pan-Ams."

Competing and travelling around the hemisphere is not new to Toupin as she represented Canada at the 2024 Junior Pan-American Championships in Brazil.

The current Canadian champ described what she learned during her first major international competition: "I lost my first match and I was disappointed, but I realized that I had to learn from each individual performance in order to improve."

In addition to improving as a national championship-calibre athlete, Toupin seeks to better the lives of others less fortunate than her. She actively works within the Philippine Canadian Charitable Foundation (PCCF), promoting youth leadership, cultural pride, volunteerism, and community engagement.

Most recently, Toupin travelled to the Philippines in February for a month-long charitable mission with PCCF.

During the trip, she visited orphanages, women's shelters, and schools for children with special needs and helped to raise awareness about underserved communities.

The Canadian karate champion described the satisfaction that international charity work provides.

"It feels good to help people who are without food and water—to make a difference in their lives."

Toupin's recent trip to the Philippines also had a fun side which included catching up with family and competing in a karate tournament.

"One of the best parts of the trip was going to see my family, especially visiting with my cousins. I also competed in local tournaments and won four matches."

When asked how she did overall at the international tourney, the modest first-year high school student nodded and smiled: "I won gold."

Toupin is no stranger to the podium in other kinds of competitions as well. In addition to winning the national karate championship last week, Charisma is the reigning Ms. Teen Canada-Philippines.

Her father, Bruce Toupin, who owns Northern Karate School Aurora and served as his daughter's

first coach, reflected on Charisma's journey.

"She showed interest in karate when she was four. Along the way, she's learned to be mindful of other people, she's made sacrifices to become a national champion, and during that time, she's learned to be very appreciative and approachable, and she's become so well-liked."

Charisma's mother, Charity dela Cruz-Toupin, concurred with Coach Toupin's assessment and added that, "all her competitors are friendly with her."

She won the Friendship Award at

the Miss Teen Canada-Philippines pageant. Charisma is a dedicated student-athlete and continues to inspire young people in Aurora through her hard work, humility, compassion, and commitment both on and off the tatami."

When asked what advice she would offer younger Aurorans who aspire to be national champions, Charisma Toupin offered wise words that stand the test of time: "Work hard. Enjoy it. Don't focus on winning all the time. Enjoy your sport and have fun—that's all that matters."

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Doug Steele named Aurora's 2026 Citizen of the Year

the lives of others. From page 1 stop there.
 “He joined Welcoming Arms – our wonderful community organization that supports vulnerable residents through food programs, practical assistance and care – starting off first as a humble volunteer dishwasher. And it was very clear quickly that he was a natural leader, and during the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, he stepped into the role of Acting Executive Director. What’s also incredibly noteworthy is he declined a salary in this position, choosing instead to ensure that resources remained focused on supporting the organization’s mission and the individuals it serves. That decision alone speaks volumes about the kind of person he is – someone motivated not by recognition or reward,

but by a genuine desire to help others.”
 Steele’s work with Welcoming Arms continues, Mayor Mrakas noted, through his service as Chair of its Board of Directors, and well as his contribution to the church community that helped lay the groundwork for the organization as a weekly liturgical lector at Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church.
 He’s also a member of the Aurora Cares Community Action Team which works to identify the needs of vulnerable and at-risk community members and strives to address those needs.
 “The truth is that this is only a snapshot of the countless ways this individual has supported, uplifted, and strengthened our community over the years,” Mayor Mrakas

Advertorial



Doug Steele accepted the 2026 Citizen of the Year honour from Mayor Tom Mrakas at Aurora Town Square on Monday evening. **Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger**

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continued. “What makes his contributions so remarkable is not just the amount of time he has given, but the humility, kindness, and genuine care for others that have defined every act of service. Simply put, Aurora is a better, kinder, and more connected community because of his quiet leadership and unwavering commitment to others.”

Among the community members who put Steele’s name forward for Citizen of the Year was incumbent Welcoming Arms Executive Director Sally Freitas, who said “few individuals embody the spirit of community, service, and selfless leadership as completely as he does.”

“As Chair of two non-profit organizations in Aurora, Doug has demonstrated exceptional dedication and steady leadership,” she said. “He not only fulfils the responsibilities of those roles, but consistently goes above and beyond them. His ability to organize, inspire, and mobilize others has strengthened our community in lasting ways. During the COVID-19 pandemic, his leadership was especially impactful. At a time when uncertainty and isolation weighed heavily on so many, he ensured that our organization remained active, responsive, and connected. His calm determination and thoughtful coordination helped us continue serving those who depended on us most.

“What truly sets Doug apart is his unwavering commitment to looking out for those in need. His community-minded outlook is not occasional or situational – it is a daily practice. He consistently offers his time, energy, and resources without

hesitation, and he does so with good nature, humility and a smile. In every sense, Doug exemplifies what it means to be Citizen of the Year. His leadership, compassion, and tireless service have made a meaningful difference in the lives of so many, and our community is stronger because of him.”

Previous Aurora Citizens of the Year were also eager to sing his praises, including Vern Cunningham and Barb Allen.

“His service has been across all religious affiliations supporting everyone – a true Aurora citizen,” said Cunningham, who has worked with Steele through the Aurora Whisky Society.

Added Allen: “Doug and I both joined the Executive Council (EC) of Welcoming Arms on the same day. Doug then agreed to be Chair of our EC in 2019. Shortly after becoming Chair, COVID arrived and our ED left her position! As was the case for all organizations during COVID, Welcoming Arms had to pivot – and quickly. With Doug’s strong leadership, we got all three of our programs (Welcome Table, Martha’s Table, and Bridging the Gap) up and running, in various modified forms. Doug took on many of the roles that our ED would have done, including fundraising, sitting on every committee, dealing with our finances, connecting with the community, and being the face of Welcoming Arms.

“Doug is a valuable Aurora citizen who makes a difference in the lives of our more vulnerable citizens.”

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Aurora celebrates volunteers in style



The Town of Aurora held its Community Recognition Awards on Monday night at Aurora Town Square. Among the evening's honourees were: (TOP ROW) The Arts and Culture Award, presented by Councillor Rachel Gilliland, went to Nelia Pacheco of the Aurora Film Circuit. The Community Leadership Award, presented by Councillor Michael Thompson, went to Brock Weir, editor of The Auroran. (SECOND ROW) Councillor Thompson presented the Community Safety Award to the Men's Shed of the Aurora Seniors' Centre. The Good Business Award, presented by Councillor Harold Kim, honoured Highland GM. (THIRD ROW) Gord and Sandra Smith received the Good Neighbour Award from Councillor Ron Weese. The Green Award, presented by Councillor Wendy Gaertner, went to the Aurora Community Arboretum. (FOURTH ROW) Historian and writer Jacqueline Stuart received the Heritage Award, also from Councillor Gaertner, while Councillor Gilliland presented the Inclusivity Award to Body Positive Fitness. (FIFTH ROW) Anthony Garramore was presented the Older Adult Volunteer Award from Councillor Kim, while the Youth Volunteer Award, as presented by Councillor John Gallo, went to Luka Dean.

Tim Jones awarded Lifetime Achievement Award from Town

Jones is Aurora's longest-serving mayor

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Former Aurora mayor Tim Jones has been honoured with the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Town he has served for the better part of 50 years.

Jones, Aurora's longest-serving Mayor, was honoured Monday night at Aurora Town Square as part of the Town's annual Community Recognition Awards.

An honour bestowed to a citizen only once in any given term of Council, this is only the second Lifetime Achievement Award presented since its creation, the first recipient being long-time business and community leader Rosalyn Gonsalves, who received the honour in 2022.

"Few individuals have left a deeper or more lasting mark on the Town of Aurora than Tim Jones," said Mayor Tom Mrakas at Monday's ceremony. "As a Councillor and Mayor, Tim helped shape modern Aurora, bringing us into the 21st century with forward-thinking policies and plans that have been fundamental in allowing us to grow responsibly and sustainably. Many of the things residents value most about Aurora today were influenced, shaped, or championed by Tim's leadership and vision. As someone who now has the privilege of serving as Mayor, I can tell you personally that Tim's leadership, integrity, and deep commitment to this community have been a real inspiration to me. He showed that leadership is not about recognition or titles – it's about service, humility and leaving your community better than you found it. But what sets Tim apart is the work he did outside of Town Hall, and in the years after he left office."

Jones was saluted for his foundational work in establishing the Character Community Foundation of York Region as co-chair with former Markham mayor Don Cousens, an organization that offered students, individuals, and organizations with workshops on fostering positive character development, and his service as a founding community ambassador for Neighbourhood Network, promoting the value of local volunteerism and opportunities to get involved.

He's also been involved with the Southlake Health Foundation, spearheaded the annual charity golf classic for CHATS (Community and Home Assistance to Seniors), which bears his name, and much more.

"What's remarkable about Tim is that no matter the role – mayor, volunteer, fundraiser, mentor, or community advocate – he has always led with humility and genuine care for people," Mayor Mrakas continued. "Tim, your contributions have touched every aspect of this Town, and you can feel it throughout this community – at Town Hall, in our downtown, and even when walking the Tim Jones Trail, a lasting tribute to the environmental stewardship and vision you brought to this Town during your years on Council. Your legacy is woven into the fabric of this community and generations of residents will continue to benefit from the work that you've done."

"Few people leave a legacy that can truly be seen, felt, and experienced across an entire community, but Tim absolutely has. Aurora is a stronger place because of the enormous contributions you have made, and we're grateful for everything you have done."

This gratitude was returned by Jones,



Tim Jones, former mayor of Aurora, received the Lifetime Achievement Award, recognizing nearly 50 years of community service, from incumbent Mayor Tom Mrakas. **Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger**

who was first elected as an Aurora Councillor in 1978 and served as Mayor from 1995-2006.

"I think just making it to 78-years-old is probably a good lifetime achievement," Jones joked to The Auroran, adding "there's a whole lot of people in Town that are just as deserving and probably more."

Looking back on his time on Council, he has fond memories of the work he did with then-Councillor and later mayor John West resulting in the Town's first Parks and Recreation Master Plan, advocacy for the community, for the Character Community Foundation, Neighbourhood Network and more.

"Respect, honesty, integrity and taking responsibility would be the first that would come to mind," when asked what character attributes stood him in particularly good stead throughout his career.

The Mayor's Charity Golf Classic is another initiative established by Jones which continues to serve the community

– another particular point of pride.

"We've returned over a million dollars to the community through that tournament, to charities, and to worthy causes," he says, when asked on what keeps him engaged in the Aurora community. "When you spend 28 years on Council and you don't have to go to the office the next day, I still felt I wanted to be a part of my community and do things."

One of the first opportunities he had to do so was joining the Neighbourhood Network team shortly after his defeat in the 2006 municipal election.

"Aurora has always been a great community of volunteers and volunteering. [For me,] I think it's in your blood. I think anybody who serves the community, or has worked in it, it's just there. I hope this [recognition] sets an example, if anything else, for other people to get involved, to volunteer, to see what it's about, because you'll feel good about it. It's just something that is very rewarding."



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Aurora honours its unsung “roots” at Community Recognition Awards

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Community builders who often avoid the spotlight were in the limelight at Aurora Town Square on Monday night as the Town of Aurora hosted the annual Community Recognition Awards.

The Community Recognition Awards are held each year to honour volunteers, community builders, and others who have made important contributions to the Aurora community and even beyond.

“Volunteers are the roots of our community,” said Mayor Tom Mrakas, who served as the evening’s emcee. “We don’t often see the roots – they work quietly beneath the surface, unseen and without recognition. Yet they provide the nourishment, strength and stability that allow everything above ground to flourish. Because of strong roots, trees weather storms. Because of strong roots, gardens bloom. And because of volunteers, communities thrive.

“Every program that inspires a child, every event that brings neighbours together, every helping hand extended to someone in need – all of these are made possible by people like you. You coach our young athletes. You mentor our youth. You visit seniors. You support charities. You organize events. You raise funds. You step forward whenever our community needs you. And while your efforts may not always be visible to everyone, their impact is felt everywhere.

“Your kindness creates belonging. Your dedication builds resilience. Your generosity helps Aurora continue to grow and flourish.

ARTS & CULTURE AWARD NELIA PACHECO

(Presented to an individual or group that has enhanced our community through their support or promotion of culture, music, visual, performing, or the literary arts)

“Nelia is a driving force in shaping arts and culture in Aurora. As Chair and Programmer of the Aurora Film Circuit, she curates a monthly lineup of diverse, thought-provoking films that engages and inspires the community. Her influence goes beyond cinema; she organized a special Italian Heritage Month screening for Royal Rose Gallery, featuring an artist Q&A and live music. Nelia is also a strong advocate for literary arts, leading Authors Night for Aurora Black Community where Black authors are celebrated through meaningful dialogue and storytelling. Through her dedication, she strengthens Aurora’s cultural scene and creates spaces for creativity, connection, and community engagement.”

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AWARD – BROCK WEIR

(Presented to an individual or not-for-profit that has significantly enhanced the Town through their contribution, commitment, and leadership in the areas of charitable giving, civic engagement, community events, or community spirit)

“Brock is a trusted and unifying voice in Aurora whose journalism strengthens civic awareness, celebrates community spirit, and connects residents of all ages. Through fair, balanced, and deeply engaged reporting, he amplifies local initiatives across Aurora Town Square, the Aurora Cultural Centre, the Aurora

Museum & Archives, the Aurora Public Library, and countless community events. Brock doesn’t just cover stories – he shows up, listens, and builds meaningful relationships that inspire participation and collaboration. With integrity, clear communication, and a genuine commitment to community, Brock’s work uplifts organizations, highlights diverse community celebrations, and helps Aurora thrive as an informed, connected, and vibrant town.”

COMMUNITY SAFETY AWARD MEN’S SHED

(Presented to an individual or organization that is dedicated to the development, promotion, or support of initiatives that improve community safety)

“The Aurora Men’s Shed plays an essential role in keeping community events safe, welcoming and well-organized. As volunteer marshals for the Canada Day Parade, they coordinate floats, support crowd control, and ensure spectators remain safely distanced, which are all vital roles for running the parade. At Aurora Town Square events, they guide guests to seating, elevators, washrooms, and exits, reducing confusion and helping seniors and those that require additional mobility support navigate comfortably. Their calm presence, attentiveness, and willingness to assist anyone in need creates a reassuring environment. Reliable, proactive, and community-minded, the Men’s Shed strengthens public safety and fosters trust at every event.”

GOOD BUSINESS AWARD HIGHLAND GM

(Presented to an Aurora Business that has shown its commitment to assisting Aurora’s economic prosperity, corporate responsibility, and community involvement)

“Highland GM has long been a dedicated community partner in Aurora, consistently supporting local charities, events and organizations. Their contributions extend far beyond financial giving – they actively participate in initiatives such as Drive for a Cause, sponsor the Run for Southlake, and even serve as the event’s pace car. Highland GM generously offers their showroom and space for community programs, including the Optimist Club of Aurora’s annual car rally. Their ongoing commitment to Welcoming Arms, the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame, Southlake, and many others reflects a business deeply invested in Aurora’s wellbeing, spirit, and continued prosperity.”

GOOD NEIGHBOUR AWARD GORD AND SANDRA SMITH

(Presented to someone who embodies what it means to be a good neighbour, celebrating the simple acts of kindness and compassion that help create connected and vibrant neighbourhoods)

“Gord and Sandra embody what it means to be good neighbours, offering unwavering kindness, support, and compassion for over 20 years. Their care has allowed their 90-year-old neighbour to continue living safely and independently – from checking in daily and watching over his home, to clearing snow and helping repair storm damage. When he returned from a hospital stay, they arrived with a list in hand, ready to shop, restock his fridge, and ensure he

had everything he needed. Gord and Sandra’s quiet, consistent generosity has strengthened their street, creating a neighbourhood rooted in trust, connection, and genuine community spirit.”

GREEN AWARD – AURORA COMMUNITY ARBORETUM

(Presented to an individual, business, or organization that supports the protection, preservation, sustainability, or conservation of our natural environment)

“The Aurora Community Arboretum (ACA) is a remarkable steward of Aurora’s natural environment, developing and preserving 100 acres of parkland through dedicated volunteer leadership and hands-on conservation. From annual tree and daffodil plantings to guided bird walks, educational signage, and protecting the Trumpeter Swans, the ACA fosters awareness, biodiversity, and year-round outdoor enjoyment. Their work includes restoring habitats by controlling invasive species such as [in] the pond, maintaining a thriving nursery, and partnering with the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority on major planting initiatives. With thousands of volunteer hours and a commitment to education and sustainability, the ACA continues to grow a greener, healthier, and more connected Aurora.”

HERITAGE AWARD JACQUELINE STUART

(Presented to an individual, business, or organization, that supports heritage conservation, education, or awareness in the Town)

“Jacqueline has devoted decades to preserving, interpreting and sharing Aurora’s history, leaving an enduring legacy that shapes how the Town understands its past. As Curator of the Aurora Historical Society and Aurora Museum for 25 years, she conducted extensive research, safeguarded artefacts, and uncovered lesser-known stories that broadened the community’s heritage narrative. Her expertise supported key heritage designations, informed publications, and inspired engaging public programs. Jacqueline’s meticulous documentation of Aurora’s properties and histories remains one of the foundation stones of local heritage work today. Through her scholarship, storytelling, and ongoing volunteerism, she has profoundly advanced the protection and celebration of Aurora’s heritage.”

INCLUSIVITY AWARD BODY POSITIVE FITNESS

(Presented to an individual, group or business that has contributed to making the Town a more accessible and inclusive place for all)

“This new exercise and strength training studio is transforming inclusivity in Aurora by creating a welcoming, judgement-free space for people who don’t feel comfortable in mainstream fitness environments, especially older adults and those navigating injuries, changing bodies, or new beginnings. With small classes, age-appropriate programming, and personalized support for all abilities and body types, the studio prioritizes confidence, balance, and overall wellbeing over intensity or appearance. Rooted in positivity, connection, and community, the studio goes beyond fitness. It creates meaningful social connection, reduces isolation, and helps people be seen and supported both inside and outside the space. As Aurora’s population continues to age, this inclusive environment fills a critical gap by promoting belonging and empowerment for those who have long been overlooked or underserved in traditional fitness spaces.”

OLDER ADULT VOLUNTEER AWARD – ANTHONY GARRAMONE

“Anthony is a tireless volunteer whose enthusiasm and generosity brighten countless events across Aurora. Whether dressing up for children at the Aurora Farmers’ Market and Aurora’s Christmas Market, checking tickets at the Winter Blues Festival, supporting the Santa Under the Stars Parade, or assisting cultural and community programs, he brings joy, reliability, and spirit to every role. A committed member of the Optimist Club of Aurora, Odd Fellows, the Aurora Legion, and multiple Town organizations, Anthony leads by example – encouraging fellow older adults to get involved through his positivity and trademark thumbs-up. His passion for community-building makes him an inspiring and deeply valued volunteer.”

YOUTH VOLUNTEER AWARD LUKA DEAN

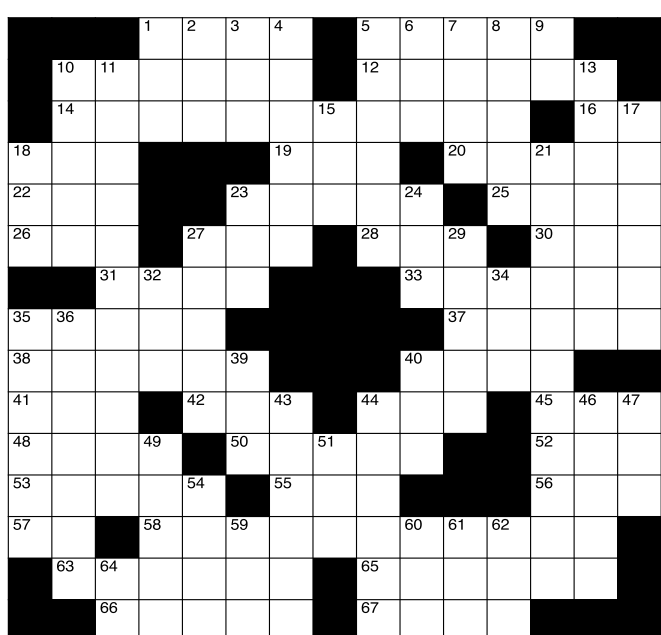
“Luka is an inspiring young leader whose passion for environmental stewardship has created meaningful opportunities for youth across Aurora. As the founder of Ecology Enthusiasts, they independently built a thriving, youth-led program that teaches hands-on ecology, ethical environmental practices, and community outreach. Their collaborations – from bird conservation to pollinator gardens and rain barrel projects – empower teens to take action and develop real world skills. Luka also brings creativity and enthusiasm to Aurora’s Haunted Forest, engaging peers to volunteer alongside them. Their dedication, resilience, and commitment to expanding environmental education make Luka a powerful role model and a positive force shaping Aurora’s future.”

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CLUES ACROSS

1. Streetcar
5. Take ___ of it!
10. SW Asia peninsula
12. Beating wings to escape from a perch
14. One who revitalizes
16. Indicates position
18. Dishonorable man
19. Singer King Cole
20. Short-tailed marten
22. One point east (clockwise) of due north
23. The god of the underworld in ancient mythology
25. Dirt
26. Superconducting super collider
27. Not good
28. A way to sink
30. Unwell
31. Follow orders
33. Deep ravine
35. Perfumery practice
37. Indian film director Sultan
38. Member of U.S. Navy
40. Wing-like
41. Very fast airplane
42. Slang for cigarette
44. Most cars still need it
45. Political war chest
48. Cools down
50. Diminish toward one end
52. Indigenous person of Thailand
53. Combined
55. Container
56. Expression of satisfaction
57. Thou
58. Return a favor
63. Go over once more
65. Removed
66. “Silence of the ___”
67. Comedian Rogen

CLUES DOWN

1. Children’s game
2. Relative biological effectiveness (abbr.)
3. Own (Scottish)
4. Female follower of Bacchus
5. Subsides
6. Protects from weather
7. Spanish municipality
8. Supermarket chain
9. Domain name
10. Semitic peoples
11. Designs anew
13. City associated with Jesus
15. Cool!
17. Bank employee
18. Central nervous system
21. Standardized piece of text
23. A type of fever
24. Baglike structure in a plant or animal
27. Threaten persistently
29. Aspirations
32. Baby’s eating accessory
34. Actress Thurman
35. Turn into bone
36. One who saves you
39. Consume
40. Swiss river
43. A part of a river where the current is very fast
44. Categories
46. Expressed amazement
47. It’s important in respiration (abbr.)
49. Greek war dance
51. Bland, semi-liquid food
54. Regard in a specified way
59. Taxi
60. Naturally occurring solid material
61. Feline
62. Post-burning residue
64. Elevated railroad

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THINGS... you ought to know

OPINION

From page 5

SATURDAY, MAY 30

The Aurora Farmers' Market & Artisan Fair takes place today at Town Park from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.

SUNDAY, MAY 31 AURORA PRIDE FESTIVAL –

Join the Aurora Community Band and Borealis Big Band, in partnership with the Town of Aurora and York Pride, as we celebrate the 2nd Annual Aurora Pride Festival on Sunday, May 31, 2026, from 1 to 5 p.m. at Aurora Town Square. Enjoy an uplifting afternoon of music, connection, and celebration as we come together to honour diversity, inclusion, and community in the heart of Aurora. For more, visit aurora.ca/whatson.

SUNDAY, JUNE 7

Aurora Community Band presents: A Gallery in Sound - Music Inspired by Art. 3 – 5 p.m. Join the Aurora Community Band for an afternoon of music inspired by visual arts. The concert will include music from Disney's Fantasia 2000, Scenes from The Louvre, Postcards from Manhattan and Selections from Moulin Rouge. Location: At the beautiful Aurora Town Square. Tickets: \$20 Get your tickets: [/boxoffice.auroratownsquare.ca/event/109:157/109:203](http://boxoffice.auroratownsquare.ca/event/109:157/109:203).

SATURDAY, JUNE 13

The Aurora Performing Arts Festival will take place at Aurora Town Square today

from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Come out and see who gets crowned Aurora's 2026 Teen Idol! For more information, visit www.aurora.ca/recreation-arts-and-culture/specialevents/aurora-performing-arts-festival.

TUESDAY, JUNE 16

Aurora Cares Housing For All presents Thinking Beyond the Market, a film screening, tonight at the Aurora Town Square Performance Hall. Showtime is 7 p.m. and tickets are \$8.42. Join Dr. Brian Doucet & guests in this full-length documentary film as he travels across Canada to learn about policies, programs and projects that are helping to ensure housing is a human right. Sponsored by Concierge Realty Group. Net proceeds for this event will be donated to the Aurora Food Pantry. For more, visit aurora.ca/whatson.

SATURDAY, JUNE 20

Caledon East United Church (6040 Old Church Road) will host a Yard, Craft & Vendor Sale from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Outdoors, rain or shine. Prices you can't resist - come early! Check out the Bake Sale and BBQ, too. Want to sell your items or be a vendor? Call Grace at 905-584-9974. Tables are \$25.

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Support AbuseHurts' Delivering Hope Full Circle Program textile recycling and donation program. A greater number of people are wanting to donate or get rid of unwanted items, increasing the need for more outlets being available to receive the items. This program will provide a convenient way for people to donate or get rid of used/unwanted clothing, blankets, linens and furniture and will help lessen the amount of items ending up in landfills. Materials that were previously perceived as waste will now be seen as a valuable resource further encouraging redistribution. The items will be recycled in the following ways: To be given to individuals who are survivors of violence and are transitioning from shelters into new homes; To be sold in our store; To be sold to a textile recycler, which makes for an ongoing source of funding for Abuse Hurts enabling them to provide their services to the thousands of people that require them each year. When and Where: Monday and Wednesday, every week, 10 a.m. – 4 p.m., with 30-minute time slots – only 1 drop off per time slot. If you do not have an appointment, we cannot accept your donation. The Abuse Hurts Warehouse is located at 1208 Gorham St, Unit 4, Newmarket - rear unloading dock. Visit AbuseHurts.ca to select your drop off time slot.

That's why government incentives and regulations are often necessary, as well as more avenues to sell reclaimed materials.

As with just about everything in our consumer-based societies, though, the economic system itself creates the problem. The bottom line rarely underlines the most environmentally sustainable path. Using more products, doing things quickly and discarding and replacing products and materials all generate more profit than conserving, reducing, reusing and recycling.

We need to aim for a circular rather than a linear economy. This means considering the entire life cycle of the goods we produce — designing products to create zero or minimal waste and pollution, keeping products in use through better design, repair, reuse and recycling and safely returning materials to the natural environment while using renewable energy.

Homes and buildings are a good place to start. Deconstruction should be mandatory.

David Suzuki is a scientist, broadcaster, author and co-founder of the David Suzuki Foundation. Written with David Suzuki Foundation Senior Writer and Editor Ian Hanington. Learn more at david Suzuki.org

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WEEKLY LEASE OF

\$100

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2.99%
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FOR 36 MONTHS WITH \$2,259 DOWN
ON 2026 FORESTER CONVENIENCE



2026 SUBARU OUTBACK



All-New Engineering, Consistently Legendary Capability

The Subaru Outback has always defined its own category – an adventure vehicle engineered for real life, built to perform where other SUVs and crossovers meet their limits. The all-new 2026 Subaru Outback carries that legacy forward with a bold new design, increased stance, refined interior and even greater capability in all conditions.



New Roads Subaru Newmarket

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SUBARU

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Limited-time lease offer provided through Subaru Financial Services by TCCI on approved credit. Representative lease example based on a new and previously unregistered 2026 Crosstrek Convenience model (TXACP). Lease Vehicle Price is \$33,460, which includes: MSRP \$30,595; freight and PDI \$2,295; dealer administration fee \$549; Air Conditioning Surcharge \$100, OMVIC Fee \$22, Tire Resource Recovery Environmental Fee \$25, PPSA Fee \$24, PPSA Service Fee \$4, Security \$399; as well as all other applicable fees, levies and duties (all of which may vary by dealer). Applicable sales taxes, license, registration and insurance are extra. Lease APR of 2.49% for 36 months. Lease payments of \$85 weekly with \$1,950 down payment. Total of 156 weekly lease payments required. Lease end value \$20,185.20 with \$3162.59 due on delivery. \$15,210 total lease obligation. Lease based on a maximum of 16,000 km per year for 36 months, with excess charged at \$0.10/km. Offer ends April 30, 2026. See NewRoads Subaru Newmarket for details.