

Activate Aurora campaign looks to make Aurora Canada's most active community



By Jake Courtepatte

Sport Aurora Past President Ron Weese wants the Aurora community to know that children born today will have a shorter projected lifespan than their parents, for the first time since the 1960s.

The sedentary lifestyle and poor nutrition habits of today's youth are just two of the factors that the Activate Aurora campaign is looking to combat, having officially launched Sunday at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex.

A full house packed the complex's gym for presentations from Mr. Weese, local dignitaries, and sportscaster and Aurora resident James Duthie, who played emcee for the event.

"Residents are becoming more aware of the negative effects a sedentary lifestyle has on their health," said Weese, who is Chair of the Activate Aurora Working Group. "The Activate Aurora Campaign will help everyone increase their current activity level and create a community shift towards the importance of physical literacy for all ages."

Initiatives will begin at an educational level, providing residents with the tools and information needed to sustain a healthy lifestyle, said Weese.

Activate Aurora began in 2014 when a group of almost 40 community leaders, spearheaded by Sport Aurora, came together to discuss collaborative ways to combat an increase in sedentary lifestyles. With funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, Activate Aurora is involving all walks of local life, from school boards, to Southlake Regional Health Centre, York Region Public Health, municipal recreation providers, sport organizations, early childhood educators, community groups and seniors associations. While Mayor Geoff Dawe declared 2015 Aurora's "Year of Sport" early last year, the official launch of the Activate Aurora initiative sets out a new goal for the Town for the year 2020.

"This is an absolutely fantastic initiative," said Mr. Duthie. "In my job, I get to see the best athletes in the world, but that elite level of training is not what this is about. It's about one step at a time. Anything we can do to get people moving, eating healthy, is a success. It's not just about sports, it's about doing anything you can to become more active."

Weese said anybody at any age has the opportunity to be more active, not only through sports but countless other options laid out in the education initiative of the program.

"One of the issues we have with most people, is people aren't skilled enough to participate," said Mr. Weese. "What it suggests is we have developed into people that just don't know how to run, jump, throw, catch, skate, swim. Wouldn't it be great if every child in this community could skate, every child could swim?"

The Activate Aurora campaign team is also putting an early focus on changes within the home, like the amount of screen time people have per day. According to a national study, kids spend an average of seven hours in front of a screen every day, a number Weese said they hope parents in the community can help bring down.

In terms of nutrition, the campaign will focus on limiting tobacco sales in the community, lowering sugar intakes, and altering school lunches, among others.

Through a video message, Mayor Dawe put out a challenge to other Canadian communities to step to the plate in reversing the

sedentary lifestyle.

For those wanting to learn more about the sports and programs available in the community, an interactive sport expo capped off the event showcasing over twenty local clubs.

More information on the campaign can be found at www.beactiveaurora.ca.