

Brandt, Doyle and newcomer Sheppard blow roof off Hoedown



By Brock Weir

Country star Paul Brandt, Great Big Sea's Alan Doyle, and Hoedown Showdown winner Mac Sheppard pooled their talents last week to blow the roof off York Region's biggest party.

Magna's annual Wild, Wild West Hoedown kicked off Friday under the big top of the Magna Corral for two days of great music, great food, and supporting great causes.

Once the numbers were crunched from event ticket sales, raffle ticket sales, and more, by the time Magna founder Frank Stronach brought out the cheque alongside CEO Don Walker, Aurora Councillor John Abel and Mayors Steve Pellegrini of King, Tony Van Bynen of Newmarket and Virginia Hackson of East Gwillimbury, \$479,000 was set to be shared equally between 15 community organizations.

This was up over \$15,000 from last year's fundraising efforts.

For the second year running, Hoedown kicked off with a lunchtime Hoedown tailored for York Region's Special Needs students. Over 1,000 youth turned out with their teachers and caregivers to take in performances from Beverley Mahood, Leah Daniels, and more, all the while having a chance to contribute to the cause as well.

"You're helping others help others," York Region District School Board teacher Derek Bunn, founder of the special needs Hoedown, told the crowds. Thank you for being a very important part of that chain of helping the community. This is an atmosphere of friendship, it is an atmosphere of giving back and caring for others."

This sentiment was shared by Magna's Steve Hinder who said they had no hesitation jumping at the opportunity to host such a special event two years ago.

Friday also signalled the end of this year's Hoedown Showdown competition where the Top 10 from all over Ontario had the chance to perform before thousands of country fans and the all-important judges, including Ms. Mahood, Mr. Hinder and philanthropist Joan Walker.

This year's winner is 15-year-old Keswick resident Shepherd, who opened for Paul Brant as he took the stage for Saturday's grand finale.