

BROCK'S BANTER: Exit through the gift shop

Looking a gift horse in the mouth

By Brock Weir

Now that the Pan Am Torch has come and gone on its circuitous route back to Toronto, Aurora can carve another proud notch into its belt. Events like these really serve to bring the community together and, in this case, really tout the athletes ? past, present and future ? that really make this community great.

I hope those local residents who participated in the torch relay, whether they carried the torch themselves or took part in another capacity, were left with a memento or two from the day. An unlit torch kept under the bed for future generations would be a cherished heirloom, but ones left on display for the public at large would only serve to inspire the community. A streamlined trophy of sorts we can all be proud of.

Trophies are always curious objects. Admit it: we've all hankered after one at one point or another, a recognition of something we might think is deserved and/or hard-earned, a shiny reminder of an accomplishment that can look lovely on a mantle, or even a piece of victory booty ? you might not want the thing, but you'll take it in principle if it means victory over an old foe.

The problem can be, however, once you get it, what the hell are you going to do with it? It might look good on the aforementioned mantle, but sometimes a disproportioned sculpture of the Winged Victory just doesn't go with your décor. Rather than stuffing it away in a closet, some invest in a trophy case which handily ups the taste factor when it comes to the ultimate combo of pride and kitsch.

When representatives from the local hospital and the event board came to Town Hall a couple of weeks ago to present the Town of Aurora with the Municipal Challenge Cup, their ultimate prize for being the top municipal fundraisers for the Run or Walk for Southlake 2015 amongst all the towns in Southlake's catchment area, it was a particular point of pride for Councillor Michael Thompson, who had worked so hard to get the word out about Team Aurora and all the stops they could pull to snatch victory back from their friends in East Gwillimbury.

Thankfully, the Municipal Challenge Cup didn't come with Winged Victories, silver crowned lions, or an unlikely phoenix rising from the ashes ? but it lived up to its name of being a tastefully handled cup with a black base. After its presentation, many were looking forward to the Cup taking pride of place once again in the Town Hall trophy case just outside the main entrance, along with numerous other awards collected by the Town including two polar bears chilling on an ice flow, once the trophy of the Business Achievement Awards handed out by the Aurora Chamber of Commerce (kitsch factor: 11) and the framed certificate recognizing the Town's win of the Prince of Wales' Award for Heritage Conservation signed by Prince Charles himself.

As I walked into Town Hall for last week's mammoth Council meeting, I was greeted by a good crowd of people in the foyer waiting for the show to get underway. Zigzagging around them to get by the main customer service desk, I noticed one of those two polar bears peaking around from the frosted glass by the men's washrooms. Hmm? these poor polar bears were displaced from their homes, and global warming, for once, shouldn't be to blame. A few steps later revealed a bounty of trophies, and the Prince of Wales prize lying on the counter behind them.

I just had to reverse my steps. Had the trophy case been knocked off the wall? Was there some kind of repair going on? Had the panel been replaced by a larger-than-life portrait of Citizen of the Year Diane Buchanan? Nope to all of the above. What had displaced Aurora's prized awards? you might ask. Well, I'll tell you.

A GIFT SHOP!

Yes, that's right. The Town of Aurora now has a gift shop for all those occasions that scream for Town of Aurora memorabilia. Personally, and really, I can only speak for myself, I hadn't realised how empty my nearly 30 Christmases have been without stocking stuffers emblazoned with the Town's celebrated corporate logo.

While we wait for the full service online gift shop to launch, here's what's on the menu:

- ? Green Mug -- \$9
- ? Stainless Steel Travel Mug -- \$18
- ? Clear Tumblers -- \$7
- ? Padfolio -- \$29
- ? Cooler Bags -- \$35

- ? Town Flag -- \$88
- ? Stationary Package (mousepad, pen, scratch pad) -- \$10
- ? Tea Set (loose leaf tea, rock sugar, tea mug, strainer) -- \$49

Is there anything here that tickles your fancy? The green mugs, bearing the Town's logo etched in white, are actually quite lovely (and popular, according to one member of staff, who seemed slightly flummoxed by the new emporium) but the rest is pretty standard fare. For a Town that so recently got worked up into a lather over a beer bill between \$50 and \$60, it is only fitting that Aurora should offer its own line of tumblers and cooler bags. If only they came with a gift certificate to fill 'er up. And, of course, in this, the age of the laptop, who wouldn't love an Aurora mousepad?

I have to admit the powers-that-be at Town Hall are a very clever bunch. When Council tasked the former CAO and his retinue of Directors to come up with ways to generate a couple of hundred thousand dollars in new revenue, the installation of a gift shop was not on the list of his suggestions for Council. In the end, it is a rather delightful surprize.

And who knew Councillor Thom's efforts to resurrect the old Aurora flag from the 1980s would lead to such a brilliant revenue generating program. The flag can now be yours for just \$88!

But, with just eight items on the menu, there are so many more opportunities that shouldn't be missed at Town Hall. The possibilities are truly endless: a 50% off fire sale for the stockpile of 'old new flags' bearing the Town's corporate logo (who wouldn't pay \$44 for a piece of history?); autographed posters and albums from the Council Critters; salt shakers sculpted to resemble former councillor Evelyn Buck; chess sets carved from wood honed from the multitude of mature trees and heritage homes bulldozed every year; deeds to acreage in municipal parks (hey, I still covet my stocking stuffer entitling me to one acre of moon land); and prints of Council 'class photos' through the years (2006 ? 2010, and 2010 ? 2014, of course, come in conveniently priced two-packs ? and, for an extra surcharge, they can airbrush out the Council members of your choice from those contentious years).

Let's go whole hog. Or, better yet, give our collective honours their proper due.