

Chamber of Commerce continues to re-invent to address challenges



By Brock Weir

The Aurora Chamber of Commerce is well on the way towards its goal of re-engaging the community, but only a half-full house turned out at Dinardo's Mansion on last Wednesday for the Chamber's Annual General Meeting.

The yearly get-together, which allows Chamber members to ask burning questions about the Chamber and also serves as a networking opportunity, allowed Javed Khan, President of the Chamber's Board of Directors to forecast further change and development surrounding the advocacy body for local business after making a sharp right turn at the start of the year.

"In January of 2016, we embarked on a new strategic plan for the Chamber, to address the challenges facing this organization, tap into the evolving expectations of our valued members, and give us a road map for moving forward," said Mr. Khan. "I am proud of what we have accomplished in the past year."

Providing a "report card" to members, he said the Chamber has worked to engage members by launching new communications initiatives to keep everyone informed of programs and opportunities within the chamber, continued with behind-the-scenes work to build a new website, which is due to launch by year's end, and reaching out to young potential members.

"We have been working on an exciting new partnership with St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School to provide engaging video updates to our members and the local business community," he said. "We're thrilled to be getting the younger generation involved in, and excited about, the Chamber and everything it has to offer. This partnership provides an opportunity for students to hone their real-life work skills and for the Chamber to pursue an up-to-the-minute mode of engaging our members and the business community at large."

"It is a win-win partnership that provides positive exposure to both the Aurora Chamber and St. Max."

In addition to reaching the younger demographic, the Chamber has also focused on retaining and recruiting members and providing savings perks through business partnerships. Mr. Khan reported a 100 per cent success rate in engaging with new businesses, partnering with Welcome Wagon, signing up 40 per cent of new businesses over the past year, up by four per cent the previous year, and bringing in 90 new members overall.

Advocacy, however, remain key. The Chamber has "reinvigorated" its Advocacy Committee, which Mr. Khan says has been meeting regularly to address issue important to business at all levels, including addressing bylaws of the chamber itself.

"It is undeniable that the current bylaws are outdated, lacking in detail, unspecific and fail to address some crucial components," he said. "The new advocacy committee will be reviewing the bylaws in detail and devising a strategy for their reform. Keep in mind, this is just the beginning. The strategic plan is a three-year initiative, with our objectives extending into 2018. We're off to an excellent start and over the course of the next year we plan to use every available resource to continue pursuing success with our objectives."

"Throughout the next year, we intend to show you that the Chamber matters to the local business community. We matter when it comes to advocacy - we listen and we stand up for Aurora businesses. We matter when it comes to premier local business networking opportunities and we will continue to provide exceptional events that facilitate connections between businesses and between businesses and the public, to help local business grow and prosper."

Engage with the Aurora Chamber of Commerce this month on October 20 for the free Aurora Chamber Tech Expo.

"The first of its kind in Aurora, the Tech Expo will connect local small businesses and entrepreneurs with the information

technology resources they need to succeed in the current business climate.?