

Charities team up as Hoedown planning gets underway



By Brock Weir

Well on the way to their 25th anniversary celebrations, Magna's Wild West Hoedown has worked not just to throw one of York Region's biggest annual parties, but engage local charities in the process.

Traditionally, 20 charities are selected to help sell event and raffle tickets for a fundraising pot they all get equal shares in. This year, a quarter century on, Magna for the Community has upped the ante to 25 charities, and now local organizations are teaming up to make the most of the opportunity.

"We want to make sure we get a good balance of organizations right across York Region," says Magna for the Community's Steve Hinder. "Our challenge is selling raffle tickets because 100 per cent of the sales go straight to the charities. Our license has always allowed us to sell up to 60,000 raffle tickets and, quite frankly, we have never met that maximum and that means there are dollars that aren't going to charities.

"We felt a lot of them were going after the same market geographically in the same area, so this year we decided to reach out a little bit broader across the Region so that the charities can reap the awards of the maximum amount of dollars coming to them."

There is also an emphasis this year "as there has been in years past" to make sure the wealth is spread evenly amongst the charities, particularly charities who have been at the receiving end of Hoedown dollars previously. Over 60 community organizations applied to get a piece of the action this year, which was then whittled down to the final 25.

"There are so many deserving organizations that we try to spread it around as much as possible," says Mr. Hinder. "There has been this level of interest for the last few years, but it never used to be [this high] and I think that is because the need is greater. There are a lot of new organizations too, some of them are pretty small, and the money they get will do a lot in keeping them viable.

"One thing I thought was very interesting is the application coming from three different York Region hospices who are collaborating to reach out. They will have a bigger network now in which to reach out and because everybody is looking for funding, they'll also spread the funds that come their way and everyone will benefit. It is spreading the pot a little bit and we have never seen that before.

The three hospices putting their heads together on the fundraising this year is Doane House Hospice, Hospice Richmond Hill, and Hospice Georgina. Rounding out this year's charities are:

" Aurora Barbarians Rugby

- ? Aurora Youth Soccer
- ? Autism Ontario (York Region Chapter)
- ? Big Brothers Big Sisters of York
- ? Community Living Newmarket Aurora
- ? Epilepsy York Region
- ? Georgina Arts Centre and Gallery
- ? Georgina Cares
- ? Habitat for Humanity York Region
- ? Hilltop Skating Club
- ? Hospice Vaughan
- ? Kinark Child and Family Services
- ? Newmarket Soccer Club
- ? Optimist Club of Newmarket
- ? Richmond Hill Mobility Accessibility Foundation
- ? Shenderey Gymnastics
- ? Safehaven
- ? Welcoming Arms
- ? Women's Centre of York Region
- ? Yellow Brick House
- ? York North Family Resource Programmes (The Family Place)
- ? York Simcoe Minor Football
- ? York Support Services Network
- ? Youth Assisting Youth

Event tickets are scheduled to go on sale in July and will be available for purchase for \$75 from the 25 selected charities, or from Neighbourhood Network and Jonathan's Restaurant in Aurora.

In addition to the fun one normally expects from the yearly bash, this year they're reviving the Hoedown Showdown as a lead-up to the big event.

The Showdown will be hosted by Magna in partnership with the Town of Aurora at the annual Ribfest. Amateur country artists from across York Region will be invited to enter the competition to see who will come out on top. The winning artist will have a chance to perform on stage at Hoedown itself. Details on how to enter will be announced later this spring.