

Countdown is on for Wild, Wild West Hoedown



By Brock Weir

The countdown is on for York Region's biggest annual party.

Representatives from over 20 community organizations gathered on the lawns of Adena Springs on Thursday afternoon to officially launch the 2018 Wild, Wild West Hoedown.

Hosted by Magna International, the annual party is a celebration of all things country and community.

Now in its 30th year, Hoedown will take place over two nights, Friday, September 14 and Saturday, September 15, at the Magna Corral on Wellington Street East.

While organizers can't announce the main Saturday night headliner until the second half of next month, they did provide a sneak peek at the Friday night lineup.

September 14 will be headlined by The Road Hammers, the highest-selling Canadian country band in history, as well as the final round of the Hoedown Showdown, the annual search for Canada's next country star.

The Friday headliner announcement was cheered ? or ?yee-hawed? as per Hoedown tradition ? by the 20 community groups spanning York Region who will split the proceeds raised in this year's event, a pot which regularly exceeds \$50,000.

?Quite simply, the only reason Magna continues with the Hoedown is because of you,? Steve Hinder, Chair of the Magna Hoedown Committee told volunteers. ?It is about giving back to the community. When you ask, why do we Hoedown? You're the reason why we Hoedown and we appreciate you for all the work that you do in the community providing services and making our communities the places we want to be.

?We did a count and collectively this year's Hoedown recipients provide services to 166,000 residents across York Region and that is awesome. Magna is very committed to supporting valuable programs and services that you all bring to the community and the community where our employees work and that is very important to us. York Region is stronger because of all the work that you do.?

This was a view shared by Marc Neeb, Magna's Executive Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer. Mr. Neeb underscored the pride Magna shares in how the Hoedown has flourished over the past 30 years, something he said wouldn't be possible without the volunteers on the ground.

?We, as an organization, couldn't possibly do Hoedown without you volunteering your time and efforts to make it a reality,? he said. ?Magna is very involved. We operate in 29 countries around the world, we do different things from a philanthropic point of view, but this is really a highlight for us because it is so big, it is so good, it involves all of the volunteers that are here today.

?Nothing brings greater joy to our employees than seeing us invest in something like this which are good for the community. That is our number one reason to invest in anything we do: will our employees be proud if we do it? I can tell you without reservation that our employees at Magna Corporate Headquarters around the corner and certainly those who are working here in the Canadian area

and certainly here in Ontario couldn't be more proud of what happens in terms of the Hoedown being a reality.?
Coming back for the fourth year this year will be a daytime Hoedown on September 15 for special needs students from all corners of York Region.

The Student Hoedown is the brainchild of teachers Derek Bunn and Dave Pilkey, who came to Neighbourhood Network, Magna's community office, with a simple idea about sharing the joy of Hoedown with everyone and making it accessible for everyone. ?Student Hoedown was born,? said Mr. Bunn. ?It was a day for high school students with disabilities to come wearing their best outfits. They come, they dance, they listen to music, they clap and gather together in a safe environment where the music and the lighting is altered and adjusted so they can experience what a hoedown is all about. They come and they meet the finalists, future country music stars, spend time with them and probably give them the best audience they have ever had in their life. They participate in the life in the community. These kids with disabilities, whether it is physical, developmental, they come and they bring donations to the charities. They are not the charity, they are contributing to the charity and I think that is the biggest eye-opener. These kids need a chance to participate and enjoy it just as much as anybody else.

?Why do I Hoedown? When I see 1,000 students with disabilities come together and help their community that is why I Hoedown, whether they are dancing on the floor with their wheelchairs or rocking back and forth, moving their fingers, or just able to move their toes and have a smile on their face.?

Now that countdown to Hoedown 2018 is on, so too are the ticket sales.

Although they are yet to announce their Saturday headliner, Mr. Hinder said that once they are able to make that announcement on August 20, the tickets will start to fly.

?When we're able to announce the Saturday headliner, people will want to steal tickets to get to the tent,? he said. ?I know if people delay the purchase of a Hoedown, their name will be Disappointment by the end of the event.?

For more information on the 2018 Hoedown, visit www.hoedown.ca.