

Dancers ? and community leaders ? lace up for Easter Seals



By Brock Weir

Since they opened their studios two years ago the dancers behind Artistica Ballroom Dance Studios set out to do something different.

Backed by testimonials and international awards, their venture has gone from success to success and 2017 has been a particularly banner year for them including picking up more international awards and recently receiving a nomination as "New Business Venture of the Year" by the Aurora Chamber of Commerce.

But, as much as their business and clientele expands, the principals "Anastasia Trutneva, Kelly Stacey and Patrick Derry" are spending the next few weeks getting back down to basics for a cause close to their hearts: taking eight community leaders and transforming them into dancing dynamos for Dancing with the Easter Seals Stars.

Now in its third year, Dancing with the Easter Seals Stars Aurora/Newmarket has raised tens of thousands of dollars to send disabled kids to summer camp. While it is an event which takes place in various forms across North America, here at home it has been shaped by Anastasia, Kelly and Patrick from the ground up and really forms the heart of what they do.

"Being back for the third year reaffirms the reason we got involved in the first place, and that is community involvement," says Kelly. "We really wanted to give back in any way we could. When we were approached by Easter Seals, we were already familiar with what the foundation does for the kids."

Adds Patrick: "It is great to be a part of something and watch its growth from one year to the next. It is not something you would do just once. The experience is just so incredible."

This year, the trio are working with a group of eight community leaders from across York Region, putting them through their fun-but-gruelling paces as they get transformed from executives, financial advisors, entrepreneurs and soccer stars into the next best thing Aurora and Newmarket will have to Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, and Gene Kelly.

As soon as the competitors are signed up and ready to go, they work collaboratively to find their groove, trying out various styles of dance, going through a host of songs to find that perfect tune to accompany their movement, brainstorming costume ideas, as well as creative ways to fundraise through social media.

It is truly a team building exercise and although the "Stars" have had to fight their way through a few minor aches, sprains and other assorted injuries on their way to dancing glory, the three helping them along the way wouldn't have it any other way.

"It's the process of getting them to try a little bit of everything, we see what they pick up on quickly, what they look good in, what they feel natural in, and that gives us the avenue to decide which dance is going to work," says Anastasia. "The big part is choosing a song that they resonate with and they enjoy listening to because they will be listening to it every day for two months!?"

While Kelly says that sometimes Stars come into the studio with a song that just doesn't work, Patrick contends that nothing is not danceable.

They say that now, but maybe they would have had a different answer three years ago when they were just starting to get their

money-making feet wet in this whole Dancing With The Stars deal.

It was a totally new experience back then, of course, as they were working with people who might have found themselves in a position far outside their comfort zone. Having someone come in, slam down some music, and say, 'Okay, we have eight weeks to get me ready with two routines for a competition' was a leap out of the dancers' comfort zones as well, but they pushed through. They count a challenge encountered that very first year as being particularly rewarding.

In that first run, Aurora storeowner Mike Rathke was on as one of the Stars but a previous health battle presented some nearly insurmountable challenges which they worked hard to overcome. On the night of the event, he lit up the dance floor, leaving not only Mr. Rathke, but the three dancers beaming with pride.

Pride is a word that comes up often when speaking with Anastasia, Kelly and Patrick about why they step up to the plate and take on this challenge each and every year. Another word that is bandied about is 'rewarding' and the experience, they explain, is rewarding on two very different fronts.

On the one hand, there is the reward that comes when taking someone who comes into the competition firm in their belief that they are not a dancer emerge with unexpected talent. On the other hand, there is the pride that comes with putting their dancing skills to use to benefit children who, for one reason or another, might not be able to dance at all.

'We are all just awe-struck listening to these kids talk about their experiences at camp,' says Patrick. 'It is hugely rewarding hearing from the kids we have met and what it means to them. For our stars, we try and help people accomplish something maybe they have always tried to do or maybe felt that they would never be able to do and it is just as rewarding to see those who were less confident or comfortable come out of their shell and not only complete the task but really thrive and really accomplish it.'

Adds Anastasia: 'Every year you get those who are super excited and can't wait to get on the floor and dance and perform, and then you get other people who are maybe more apprehensive and reserved about the experience. I am most looking forward to their transformation from the start to the final performance. They have come quite a long way from the time they started and a lot of work, they put in a lot of emotional effort into this and they have come a long way. We're just excited to showcase that to their friends and family and show them what they can do in these short two months.'

If you would like to see what they can do in two short months, tickets for the October 5 Dancing With The Stars Event are still available.

For more information, go to www.easterseals.org/dancing-with-easter-seals-stars-newmarket-aurora. There, you can purchase individual tickets for the October 5 event (\$150 per person or \$1,100 for a table of eight) as well as vote for your favourite dancer. Tickets may also be purchased by calling 705-797-2675 or emailing cmyke@easterseals.org.

This year's event will be held at the Venetian Banquet & Hospitality Centre in Concord.