

Dancing with the Stars crosses \$250k fundraising mark to Easter Seals kids to camp



By Brock Weir

Local celebrities burned up the dance floor to make dreams come true for Easter Seals Kids this month, in the fourth annual Dancing with the Stars Newmarket-Aurora.

Including money raised this time around, Dancing with the Stars Newmarket-Aurora has now raised over a quarter of a million dollars to help kids with disabilities and mobility challenges have the times of their lives at summer camps across the Province. Kids like Casey, who were on hand at the Royal Venetian on Industrial Parkway South, to drive home this message.

"Did you know kids with disabilities have zero or only one close friend, or are avoided at school and are often alone?" said Casey, taking over the microphone between dancing rounds. "Well, at camp this never happens. Easter Seals Ontario owns and operates two fully-accessible camps: Camp Woodeden in London and Camp Merrywood in Perth. When people first look at us, they don't think we're able to play basketball, hockey, go kayaking or rock climbing. Well, all of this happens at camp.

"If it wasn't for Easter Seals and you, summer camp would only be a dream and everyone deserves their dreams to come true. Let me tell you that over the past eleven years, I have had a blast. I remember my first year at camp: most kids cry when parents drop them off, but I actually cried when they picked me up!"

Among the activities that Casey highlighted were swimming and a high rope course, the latter of which, he said, caused him to lose his lunch, but there were no regrets from his perspective.

"Camp is a place where I can just be myself and forget I have a disability; so much so I even wore my boxers to the banquet and home the next day. You should have seen my mom's face when she picked me up!" he continued. "This summer at Camp Merrywood, I got to try white water rafting, something I never thought I would experience. I kept my shorts on this time, but I was wearing sparkly purple nail polish. My parents might be a bit worried!"

Casey received a huge ovation from the packed banquet hall as dance contestants hit the floor for round two, partnered with professional dancers from Artistica Ballroom Dance Studios Anastasia Trutneva, Kelly Stacey and Patrick Derry.

This year's dancing hopefuls included Maria Ciarlandini of Vince's Markets, community volunteer Shannon Clark, property manager Michael Feherty, Aurora Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Sandra Ferri, former York Regional Police Deputy Chief Bruce Herridge, martial arts champ Brad Jones, Sheryl Thomas of Marquee Theatrical Productions, and outgoing Newmarket Mayor Tony Van Bynen.

Each contestant was judged on performance, choreography, costume and partner chemistry by judges Paul Dutton, Jimmy Brennan, Andrea Peterson, and Nikki Pett.

"A lot of people in this room have certainly participated or have had the opportunity to work with these amazing folks," said event emcee Steve Hinder. "They have poured their heart and soul into making this event such an amazing night."

In the end, Michael Feherty took home Judge's Choice, but nobody left the floor empty handed. Mayor Van Bynen was awarded the Fred & Ginger Award, while Ms. Clark was named "Most Sassy", Ms. Ferri "Dancer with the Most Style", Mr. Jones "Entertainer of the Night", Ms. Thomas "Most Energy", Ms. Ciarlandini "Most Passionate", and Mr. Herridge "Best Technique."

Ms. Clark, who suffered an injury steps into her second dance before coming back onto the floor to complete it a few minutes later was awarded ?The Spirit Award.?
?It is for the person that evolves this whole Dancing with the Stars and goes above and beyond looking for donations to support our kids and tries to dance with her heart,? said Charlene Myke of Easter Seals Ontario. ?Shannon, you totally get what we do.?