

2021



THE AURORAN PROGRESS EDITION

Introducing the AURORA Progress Edition

*An annual report highlighting
local businesses in Aurora*



Service is never out of style at

By Brock Weir

Personalized service has always
been a hallmark of
Oakridge's Fashion.

Since purchasing the popular Aurora boutique in 2016, Deb Clark's mission has been simple: helping women find their individual best look.

Being that guiding hand in the midst of a global pandemic when you've been forced to close your doors, however, can be a difficult task – but it was not impossible for Ms. Clark. It came down to embracing another simple philosophy: tried and tested service never goes out of style.

From the outset, Oakridge's Fashions quickly doubled down on building more modern methods of reaching customers. Online videos on both their website and social media channels helped to reach both new and existing customers to keep them up to date on what's new, what's coming and upcoming promotions.

But they also turned back the clock to make house calls – well, porch stops – for

long-time customers.

"If I was to take a business lesson away from the pandemic, it was how to blend service with technology. As much as we pivoted towards technology and to new ways of reaching customers, we also pulled a lot of well-known, enduring service values into our delivery of technology," says Ms. Clark, reflecting on delivering new clothes to her customers porches, waiting out in the car while they tried them on at home, and waiting to see the customers give the thumbs up from their front door when the struck wardrobe gold.

"Service became the cornerstone of our navigation through the pandemic and, coupled with technology and other ways of online sales, it really became clear to us that our customers deserve the best service we can give them and we were going to show up to do that.

"When I look back on the whole thing and even as I look forward, everything changed and nothing changed. Everything changed in the terms of the way 'normal' was for the day-to-day of our business, but really people still needed the tried and tested principles of customer service. That required taking the time on the telephone to really know our customers and their needs because it was that much harder to serve them.

Oakridge's
FASHION INC.

"We had a lot of telephone calls with our customers to help prepare an order for them - and sometimes to help them place their order online, screen by screen."

It was a winning formula for the boutique and, as they continue to welcome customers back into their Aurora Shopping Centre shop, it's a mix of long-standing women who have found their beautiful, new customers who connected with Oakridge's online, and still more who are coming in through word-of-mouth.

Whatever the future holds, this updated spin on "old school" customer service will, she says, remain our compass.

"Our measure of success is that each customer leaves thinking, 'I was well served, I was valued, that was a good experience.' It's not a new measure for us, not new at all, but it has just become so much more important to our customers – and maybe to us, too," says Ms. Clark. "Being in retail during the pandemic has been rough and pretty scary at times. It's really easy to get caught up as a retailer in how to survive and forget to stay focused on what your customers need.

"We are committed to being a trusted wardrobing partner to our customers. And that means taking the time to get to know each one. After all, customer service is never one-size-fits-all."

14800 Yonge Street The Aurora Shopping Centre
oakridgefashions.com @oakridgefashions.com
905-726-4063

Fall is full steam ahead for Aurora's



FOOD IN MOTION



By Brock Weir

As soon as it was clear our first lockdown was looming in March of 2020, Food in Motion's John Cosentino "came out swinging."

If his Vata Court doors were going to be shuttered, he wanted to hit the ground running with an action plan. With so much uncertainty at that time, however, he admits he and his team might have bit off a bit more than they could chew, but, through some careful planning, they streamlined their business model, tapped into new customer bases, and focused on what they do best.

The result for the business, which celebrated its sixth anniversary in Aurora on September 14, are not only sold-out catering weekends, but collaborations with complimentary businesses that have helped Food in Motion create the best possible customer experience.

"We have taken a step back in terms of putting too much on our plate to do ourselves," says Mr. Cosentino. "We have now built relationships with sushi caterers who are doing sushi at our events, artisan mozzarella makers, wood-fired pizza chefs, to provide that experience above and beyond."

Also key in weathering the storm has been maximizing their online presence, allowing customers to not only book events well in advance, but order smaller prepared meals for pick-up with 24-hours' notice.

"The best decision we made over the last year is to start our online presence and our e-commerce website," he says, dubbing the move their "most valuable pivot."

"We prepare the food as it is ordered, the customer comes in and picks it up, and I am no longer having to go out there and create the

sales or sell over the phone, which has allowed me to concentrate on other things."

Through their e-commerce platforms, people have booked events well into 2022, and these advance bookings are filling up fast as the community looks to the fall and Thanksgiving and Christmas celebrations.

Whether it is a birthday party, a wedding, or even a stop into their kitchen to pick up hampers of meals for a weekend at the cottage, orders are being fulfilled by Mr. Cosentino and his team, led by Head Chef Michael Mara.

He says he is proud of his "energetic" staff who are flexing their creative muscles behind the scenes introducing new menu items. The environment "has never been a better nucleus" for Food in Motion's philosophy of creating delicious dishes and staying connected with the community.

"I've never looked more forward to going into work every single day to see how my team is chugging along," he says, adding the team is a mix of people who have more than 20 years' experience in the business and even students from George Brown College. "There is a real energetic wealth of experience right now that I have been blessed with over the last four or five months.



JOHN COSENTINO

"But, if it wasn't for the relationships I have created with the community in the last six years, we wouldn't be sitting here right now. I think Aurora did an outstanding job of coming together to do their best to support the small businesses and I thank everyone for their support because, without that, this would definitely be a very different story."

For more on Food in Motion, visit foodinmotion.ca.

RENOASIS OFFERING MORE FOR YOUR LIFESTYLE

By Neil Moore



LIFESTYLE WINDOWS LAUNCHED 2003

FAMILY OWNED SINCE 2007

BECAME LIFESTYLE OASIS 2014

George Hughes & son Kevin joined forces 2020 renamed it RenOasis a one-stop shop full-service design/build company

Kevin. "We are doing more sunrooms, screen rooms, and large screens as a percentage of our overall work. That has been a big change for our business."

Indeed, screen rooms continue to be popular, with screens at the top and bottom keeping out insects, dirt and leaves. These systems can also be ordered with tempered glass at the bottom, not to mention four-track window systems, to allow for as much – or as little – protection as needed. By stopping wind and rain, and adding a small heater to cut the chill, you can enjoy the "outdoors" from spring to fall.

It's about backyard living, and with a variety of custom solutions to meet customers' needs, RenOasis offers multiple ways to expand your living space and create that 'destination feeling' right at home.

George added: "Drop by our showroom, bring your imagination, and let's see what we can do for you."

RenOasis is located at 240 Industrial Pkwy S, Unit 1, Aurora. Call 905-726-4349, or visit www.renoasis.com.

If you've driven past their Industrial Pkwy South location during the past year, you may have noticed a change in signage. What was once Lifestyle Oasis is now RenOasis – a subtle, but key upgrade to this award-winning exterior home renovator that launched in 2003.

The company began as a small, family-owned and operated window and door company, opening its first Aurora location in 2007. As demand grew, along with their offerings, Lifestyle Windows moved to their current, larger showroom where customers could get a closer look at the many options before they buy.

As the product line grew to include sunrooms, porch enclosures, screen solutions, and railings, Lifestyle Windows became Lifestyle Oasis in 2014.

But owner George Hughes knew there was still room to grow. In 2020, he was joined by his son – Kevin Hughes – who brings over 10 years of construction industry experience as a structural engineer. The name change to "RenOasis" signals their evolution to a full-service design/build company.

"We are now helping homeowners with the entire construction process," said Kevin Hughes. "This involves getting the necessary building permit, and making sure they get the documentation they need to protect their investment. We guide them through the whole project."

George pointed out that for their more complex renovations, there's no longer a need to subcontract an outside engineering firm. "We can now handle everything in-house," he added. "This kind of expertise is often needed right through from start to finish. We're now a one-stop shop for our clients."

For example, when opening up a wall to install a sunroom, one can find rot or a variety of structural issues. Having an engineer on the team allows RenOasis to deal with these issues as they inevitably arise.

"It's already a big change going from Lifestyle Oasis to RenOasis," noted Kevin. "I want to reassure our customers that we are still the same organization, same team, same services and workmanship that people know in Aurora."

That being said, their focus has shifted, in particular as the COVID pandemic has continued – altering and in many cases cancelling travel plans. "People are still in 'staycation' mode, as they were last year," explained



OMAR'S SHOES
EST. 1970



POP-UP SHOP

By Brock Weir

will give customers flavour of new location

"We're sad to leave Yonge Street, but we're excited to come to Bayview because, from what we hear, this is where so much of the action is," says Raz Khamissa, who co-owns the store with his wife, Mae, with daughter Saarah also taking an active role in the business. "We want people to know we didn't walk away from Yonge Street, but this is where the growth of the Town is. We're looking forward to reaching new customers who never came over to the Yonge Street side and we hope customers who have shopped with us from the Yonge Street area are going to come over and see us as well."

"People have been saying, 'It doesn't matter where you are in Town, we will be there,'" says Mae. "Our customers have said, 'We're just happy you're going to reopen,' and that has been a key factor for just about everybody. One message that particularly stood out for me was, 'If you haven't experienced shopping at Omar's, now moving over to the east side you have the chance to experience it,' and that means a lot."

The pop-up store will open mid-September just a couple of doors down from their new permanent home.

Although space will be somewhat limited, the pop-up will showcase their core products of Birkenstocks, Blundstone and New Balance, with other products being brought in from their Newmarket store as demand requires.

"We will have some new arrivals coming in as well – a splash of new things like winter boots," says Saarah, turning her attention to the fall and winter.

Since Omar's announced the closure of their Aurora Shopping Centre location this past spring, the Khamissa family saw an outpouring support from generations of customers, as well as newer clients who happened to come in and left with an unforgettable experience.

The community's messages of support and encouragement helped buoy the family in the days of uncertainty over whether or not they would ultimately be able to keep the business in the community that embraced them.

They are grateful an adequate space was secured just last month at the eleventh hour and they are more than eager to begin a new chapter in Omar's storied history.



We want to say
THANK YOU
again to Aurora for all their support. It has been unbelievable, the phone calls, the letters, the memories – it just made us realize we can't close our doors and we have to re-open.

The Khamissa family aims to open up their new flagship Aurora location for December.

For the last two months, Aurora residents seeking out the complete customer care that has been a hallmark of Omar's Shoes for decades have had to travel up to Newmarket.

For long-time customers, it has been well worth the drive since the family-owned business was forced to close their doors at the Aurora Shopping Centre, their home for more than half-a-century.

But while it might still be little over three months until their new Aurora location in the Bayview corridor formally opens its doors, shoppers can get a flavour of things to come in a pop-up shop set to open this month in the L.A. Fitness plaza.

ROBERTS & COMPANY
Chartered Professional Accountant



Partners in your success



By Neil Moore

Whether you're a business owner or employee, it's no understatement to say we all wear many hats. Which means there's often a tendency to "do it yourself" to save some dollars. "It" may be unclogging a drain, or painting your reception area. It can also mean tax preparation and accounting.

The latter isn't always a good option for DIY'ers, as the money saved by not hiring a pro, can be more than offset in errors and missed opportunities.

After all, how many of us are fully up-to-speed on the latest tax and finance legislation?

The simple answer is "an accountant." Brian Roberts, CPA, CGA, LPA, notes that tax time can get complicated, especially when kids start attending university and there are tax credits to be transferred from child to parent and vice

versa. Or when you retire, and have to figure out income splitting...

"You may miss certain things that can cost you money," he continues. "When you hire a professional, you get what you pay for. It's the same reason I don't service my own car."

For business owners and the self employed, Brian notes that the pandemic has made quite an impact on both the revenue and expense sides. "And with the wage subsidy and other government programs, the complexity of accounting has increased. It has caused some additional work."

The firm underwent a name change in 2020 – from Van Nostrand & Partner to Roberts & Company Professional Corporation. Brian started as an employee in 1998, became a partner in 2006, and then sole owner in 2018.

"We've always looked at ourselves as a 'one-stop-shop' for bookkeeping, tax, and for the full cycle of financial accounting," he said. "You can bring in your set of books and have the bookkeeping done, we can prepare your year-end financial statements, and then do your corporate (or personal or estate) taxes. We do U.S. taxes as well."

It's not all on Brian's shoulders, as he is backed by an experienced six-person team – each of whom can handle their full suite of services.

"We are a boutique style firm," Brian continued. "You come in and instantly feel comfortable, and at home – which is important because when you're handing over all your financial records, you need a high degree of trust in the people you're working with."

"We also speak to you in your language," he added, "so that you understand more about your financial information."

Brian's team also speaks the language of the CRA, which for the average taxpayer, can be challenging, if not intimidating.

"The CRA knows what they are looking for, and sometimes they

have difficulty expressing it to the client," said Brian. "I'll speak with them directly, rather than the client, who may be a bit panicked. And if there is an audit, I'll have them come to our office rather than theirs – in particular if it's a home office. That can feel kind of invasive."

Roberts and Company looks after clients who range from lawyers and doctors, to chiropractors, dentists, architects, engineers, construction workers, and even retail workers. Although it's common to wait until year-end to connect with your accountant, Brian recommends a more frequent schedule.

"Touching base during multiple points in the year is the best way to tax plan," he noted. "You can't retroactively do it in many cases, so you need to stay ahead of the game. And all our clients know they can call me any time they have a question, like 'Should I lease or buy this car? Should I do it in my company name, or do it personally?'"

A sign of the times is reflected in some of the other questions he hears, like "I'm getting this package from my company – should I take it as a lump sum, defer it to January, or have it paid out over a few years?"

The company's tagline is "value beyond numbers," and for those who see their accountant as a partner in success, it couldn't ring more true.



Roberts & Company can be reached at 905-727-8046, or visit www.robertscpa.ca.



Service You Can Trust. Since 1924

By Sam Odrowski

A Award-winning business
T. H. OLIVER HEATING & COOLING
 (136 Wellington St. E)
 has all your temperature control needs covered. The business takes pride in offering all of the most cutting-edge and modern technologies in the industry at a competitive price.

"We always stay on top of the new technology as it's emerging to help families, if there's products that can make their lives easier," said Steve Desjardins, owner of TH Oliver. "In our industry, we want to have our finger on the pulse of that to be able to provide those products as they become available."

In addition to keeping up with the best available products, TH Oliver has a strong reputation for providing high-quality air conditioning and heating system repairs, replacements, or retrofits, as it's been servicing all of York Region for nearly 100 years.

While the bulk of the business focuses on maintaining existing systems, TH Oliver also offers duct cleaning, fireplace upgrades, Wi-Fi controlled thermostat, and indoor air quality products.

Improving the quality of air inside one's home has been of increasing importance over the last year-and-a-half, as it's one of the most effective ways for eliminating viruses like COVID-19.

"Our air cleaning products and air purifiers are capable of removing these types of contaminants and viruses from the air, inside people's homes," said Desjardins.

"This is something that we've always had, but it's even more

important now with the different viruses going around."

Duct cleaning, which TH Oliver specializes in, is an important place to start when trying to improve the quality of air inside your home. On top of air duct cleaning, upgrading your filtration or fresh air ventilation system with TH Oliver will further improve air quality.

"It doesn't protect you once you go outside your doors, but you can certainly control the environment that you're living in and sleeping in," Desjardins noted.

When it comes to the COVID-19 pandemic, TH Oliver had adapted throughout it to stay in line with Public Health guidelines.

The showroom was closed down during lockdowns but

Serving the Community for almost 100 years

it is now reopened to the public so individuals can view some of the latest products the business has to offer.

An important service that's offered now and was available through the pandemic is emergency repairs. Anyone in need of an emergency service can reach TH Oliver at 9057274258.

Going forward, Desjardins said TH Oliver is going to continue to work with manufacturers to bring the latest and greatest products to residents of York Region.

"We're going to keep on top of the technological advancements of the products, so that everybody is aware of what is available to them," he noted.

To learn more about TH Oliver and everything the business has to offer, visit: www.tholiver.com



By Sam Odrowski



AURORA Montessori School

Knowledge is power, and Aurora Montessori School (AMS) empowers its students to achieve success in all aspects of their academic and personal growth.

The school, located at 330 Industrial Parkway North, does this by utilizing a unique and diverse approach to education compared to the traditional public school system.

"Our curriculum is Montessori-based, which is very much hands-on learning with concrete materials (particularly in the early grades) and individualized programming, where we endeavour to meet the needs of each child in our care," said Kelly Parker, Principal of AMS.

Montessori educators observe their students closely and provide developmentally appropriate lessons that meet or exceed the provincial curriculum.

After they have received a lesson, students are free to work with the materials as often as they wish to gain proficiency, understanding and confidence. Elementary students are given more freedoms concerning their learning under the guidance of the teacher.

Students also gain strong work habits and interpersonal skills that serve them well beyond their elementary school years through their interaction with the curriculum.

"It's really about having the children ignite their spark and desire to learn. When you feel in control of what you're learning when you're truly interested in it, you're going to engage and do the work," Parker explained.

With respect to the Montessori approach, she noted that proficiency and conceptual understanding, confidence, critical thinking skills, curiosity, and a love of learning are the focus instead of test scores and grades.

The student-centred approach taken at AMS is done on a pristine 14-acre property that features a soccer field, marshland, an amphitheatre, multiple playgrounds, and an outdoor classroom.

AMS offers education starting at 18 months old, all the way up to Grade 8, with small class sizes so teachers can spend ample time with each student.

There are mixed-age groupings from the Casa 2/3 (JK/SK) levels



Setting students up for success for over 30 years

through to Grade 8, which allows younger students to learn and be mentored by the older students. This helps the older students to develop confidence in their knowledge and become strong leaders.

"It's almost like a mini-community in our classrooms, where everybody works together," Parker said. "Those older ones are guiding the younger ones, and they take pride in it. The younger students look up to their older mentors."

Beyond academic learning, AMS also helps instill strong social and emotional life skills, so students become good citizens, respectful of themselves, others, and not afraid to ask questions.

Currently, extracurricular activities are on pause, but Parker said AMS is very much looking forward to resuming all of its clubs, sports teams, concerts, parent education events, and special events like Grandparents Day.

Parker said community outreach is vital at AMS.

"We like to engage our students and be part of the larger local and global community," she explained.

The school conducts regular charity drives and participates in various fundraising initiatives such as raising money for Southlake during the early days of the pandemic, the Terry Fox Run and Jump Rope for Heart. Through their affiliation with The Olive Branch for Children, AMS has raised funds to support education in remote communities in Tanzania. Families love participating in the local Santa Claus Parade!

The school has a long local history, serving the Aurora area for over 32 years, and is hopeful that local residents will give the Montessori approach a try.

Anyone interested in learning more about Aurora Montessori School can visit www.auroramontessori.com or call 905-841-0065. Families can also learn more about the AMS community on Instagram and Facebook.



As a lifetime resident of York Region and a veteran Realtor with 33 years experience, Monica is a proven and trusted partner elevating her to one of the top producing realtors in Canada

"Opening Doors To Your Dreams"



Monica Stohr

Sales Representative

Reflecting back on the past year, it has been a time of uncertainty for many Canadians who have faced the challenges that a world wide pandemic created.

In early 2020, when we were asked to stay home to keep our families and neighbours safe, we quickly found out just how important "HOME" is!

It became more than a necessity to provide shelter and safety. For many, it doubled as a new workspace or a place for education, but one thing that resonated with everyone I spoke with was it was a time for reflection and a time to bring families closer while under the same roof 24 hours a day!

Time opened up for an abundance of baking, trying new recipes often with family pitching in, finishing puzzles, reading a great book or binge watching an interesting new show! Without all the running around in our daily lives we had come to know, it created more quality time with loved ones in person or catching up on zoom!

Home ownership has always been something most Canadians have strived for but our needs can become vastly different in varying stages of our lives and it seems the pandemic added another layer to that. As our space requirements changed, many realized that their current properties were not as conducive to our evolving needs.

As safety protocols were mandated to ensure the safety of Buyers and Sellers, it became clear that the demand for housing was stronger than ever. Many of my Buyers were looking to increase their space and add more private work areas or leave the city centres as home office and more outdoor living area became important. It was interesting to note that 47% of my Buyers were downsizing and felt the time was right

to prepare for retirement or invest in a secondary recreational property. As we travel less, having a secondary property for recreational purposes or for future investment has become increasingly popular.

Currently more than 1 in 10 homeowners in Canada's three largest urban centres own multiple properties.

"While some secondary properties are used for recreational purposes, many of these homes are foundational to Canada's critical supply of rental housing," said Phil Soper, president and CEO, Royal LePage. "Entrepreneurial landlords supply housing to the 30% of Canadians who rent, be they new immigrants, students, young people entering the labour force, or those who cannot or choose not to own their home."

According to statistics, **more than 40% of secondary property owners in the greater regions of Toronto used equity from their primary residence to make the purchase. As prices have been soaring for several years, homeowners have been taking advantage of the significant equity in their primary residences in order to purchase a secondary property.**

Canadian homeowners appreciate the value of real estate as they continue to watch their Real Estate investment grow. Historically, it is one of the strongest investments for long term growth regardless of the highs and lows we may experience in the market conditions.

Along with this trend, as home prices continue to grow across the country,

many young adults are turning to their parents for help with a down payment on a property. Over the past year, home values have appreciated sharply in virtually every market from coast to coast. Affordability is a major issue for young Canadians and many are turning to the so-called 'bank of mom and dad' to achieve the dream of home ownership.

Twenty-five per cent of "Boomers" say they have or would consider gifting or loaning money to a child to help with the purchase of a home.

As the demand for housing steadily grows and with continued low inventory, it is an opportunity to reflect on what is most important to your future Real Estate needs. Whether it be adding value with home improvements and enjoying your current home or downsizing / upsizing, opting for more outdoor space in outlying areas or relocating to another beautiful Canadian province, a veteran Realtor like Monica Stohr, with 33 years of experience, can help to navigate the process.

With a business that was built on repeat and referred clientele, what differentiates Monica is her innate ability and expertise in adding significant value to her clients' homes with the proper preparation prior to selling or with their new purchase. She is a proven and trusted partner which has elevated her to one of the top producing realtors in Canada.



You can contact Monica Stohr at Royal LePage

Your Community Realty

416 618-1714 or 905 727-3154

www.monicastohr.com

Flavour and ingredients are paramount for CHOCOLATE & COMPANY



By Brock Weir

As Clayton Dixon works in his garden, he's not just enjoying the benefits of getting back to nature, he's planning and planting ingredients to be used in his truffles and gelato.

Clayton, who opened Chocolate & Company at Yonge Street and Brookland Avenue late last year with decadent truffles and caramels made onsite, has been working hard to offer gelato made with the highest quality ingredients and in an old-world tradition.

"It all starts with the milk," says Clayton. "Gelato is something special – it's denser and as a result the flavour is more intense, so using local organic milk is key."

How Clayton makes his gelato is not new, but a respect and admiration to the slow and deliberate methods of the past. "Gelato is made day one, and churned day two to enhance both texture and flavour."

While there are many tried and tested flavours available to tempt just about any tastebud, gelato infused with cinnamon basil, or raspberry-anise might be for the more adventurous among us looking for a cool, sweet treat.

Many of the herbs used in the gelato are sourced directly from the expansive Dixon family garden.

The Dixons moved north to a small rural property in Whitchurch-Stouffville 11 years ago to satisfy their food-growing desires.

All of these efforts over the past decade have woven themselves into this project.



But Clayton also feels a need to push ingredients outside of the traditional methods to more plant-based alternatives.

For the past three years, he has been working on various plant-based truffles that taste just as decadent as those made with cream and butter. These plant-based varieties, available by November 2021, will present options to those sensitive to dairy, or those aligning to vegan principals.

As Chocolate & Company is closing in on its first year open for business, Clayton openly reflects on the challenges and rewards.

"Sourcing great quality ingredients has been the largest obstacle" says Clayton, who left his career in finance just prior to his 50th birthday in order to pursue this dream. "I'm passionate about it. There's a large foodie culture in Aurora

and many people are excited to come into the store to see what we have, or to taste what's new. Some customers have actually thanked me for opening a store like this. I wasn't expecting to be thanked. Nothing is more satisfying than to be appreciated this much."



Chocolate & Company

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Philthy Philly's



CheeseSteaks & Poutinerie

Bringing a classic American sandwich north of the border

By Rob Paul



The Philly cheesesteak is one of the most beloved and well-known sandwiches in North America, yet you'd be hard pressed to find one outside of Pennsylvania.

That's where Philthy Philly's decided to step in and fill the void.

Located on Bayview Avenue in Aurora, owner Tammy Economou and her team are aiming to provide the true Philadelphia experience to every customer who comes in for a bite to eat.

With a dense menu full of 28 different types of poutines and 13 different sandwiches supplemented by a selection of burgers, salads, and desserts, Philthy Philly's has something for everyone, but it's famous for its selection of cheesesteaks.

"A lot of people are familiar with a Philly cheesesteak," she said. "When you go down to Philadelphia, they have a couple of restaurants that are well known for their cheesesteaks, so we've pretty much done that here. Danny (Kotsopoulos) the franchiser has really gone out of his way to make sure the product is top-notch, and he's really done his research on the Philly cheesesteak and products. A lot of Americans even come in and they'll say, 'Oh, I've been to so many places and you guys are bang-on with a Philly cheesesteak.' And, everything is made right in front of the customers, which a lot of people really like because you get to see the process of making it right up front."

Still a relatively new chain, Philthy Philly's has 13 locations across the

Golden Horseshoe and is continuing to expand in Ontario.

"We're the eighth Philthy Philly's and the original started in Newmarket, and they started out of a food truck," Economou said. "The concept is great, and the product is high quality, so it's continuing to expand."

With the ongoing impact of the pandemic, Philthy Philly's is currently operating as takeout only and they have expanded the kitchen, but Economou says **the restaurant lends itself perfectly as a quick and easy takeout spot for customers.**

"The ups and downs of opening and closing is a lot and we've done really well with takeout," she said. "We would always have a lot of customers in the restaurant, but our product is great for takeout, and this keeps it safe."

Being in a community she's known her whole life, Economou has seen the support of people throughout the pandemic and loves operating a restaurant where she truly knows the customers.

"I was born in Newmarket and grew up around here and raised my kids up here, so Newmarket and Aurora have always been our towns," she said. "My daughter played for the Aurora Panthers—at one point I even had her whole line working here—so we know a lot of people here and my husband works in Aurora. This area and community are fantastic—everyone has rallied through this, and my regular customers have just been so fantastic. I've met so many people through this and it's amazing the sense of community."



"Our staff are the kings of the five-star review in service"

By Brock Weir

305 WELLINGTON ST E, AT THE INTERSECTION OF MARY STREET

Your perfect drive is only a click away at Aurora Hyundai

COVID-19 has changed the world – and the automotive business was anything but immune. Aurora Hyundai, however, has hit upon a winning formula to bring in new customers, serve existing clients, and maintain its five-star rating for customer service – and this formula is only a few clicks away.

Facing a chip shortage which has, in turn, resulted in limited inventory over the course of the pandemic, Aurora Hyundai adapted with a "Click to Buy" option on their website to let customers go in and build their own deal.

"You can do everything from build your own vehicle, to securing it, leaving a deposit on the vehicle on a secured site and people have really been taking advantage of this," says Aurora Hyundai's Carman Widdess, Managing Partner of Hyundai of Aurora. "People who don't feel comfortable going around will only have to come to the dealership once – to pick up their vehicle."

Those who are going around in a Hyundai are doing so in comfort none the less as the company rolls out new hybrid and electronic vehicles which have been hits with customers. Popular lines like the Santa Fe, and the Elantra have made their way to the hybrid markets, while the 2022 Tucson Hybrid is, says Mr. Widdess, "the hottest product on the market."

"Next to Tesla, Hyundai is only second on the board

Aurora Hyundai adapted with a "Click to Buy" option on their website to let customers go in and build their own deal

in technology, cell systems and EVs (Electric Vehicles) that we have right now and it just seems to be gaining more and more popularity," he says. "Over the last year-and-a-half, we've come up with 12 new or redesigned products and Hyundai is getting a lot of accolades right now for the product, the quality, the technology in the cars – it's just phenomenal."

Also phenomenal is the customer service Aurora Hyundai

has been able to provide customers throughout the pandemic.

Despite people commuting less and less as they continue to work from home, their vehicles still need to be maintained, and Aurora Hyundai's service department continues to grow.

"We have been very fortunate in that it all comes down to people," says Mr. Widdess of the early days of the pandemic. "When COVID hit over a year ago, we were down to a skeleton staff of eight from about 30. We have rebounded, made it through the shutdowns and we continue to grow our business. Our staff are the kings of the five-star review in service. People love us because we're a small-feeling dealership. It's very personalized and we get customers from everywhere just for the service department."

"At the start of COVID, we were down to two full-time techs and right now we have eight of them in the shop. We have been able to grow exponentially during that period when everyone else is pulling the reins back in. This year confirms it is always about the professional ability of our staff."

tilemaster

AURORA

Quality products from a family owned business

Whether you are building a brand new home or have decided to renovate or remodel your existing dwelling, your choice of tiles, floor coverings, and wall covering will dramatically enhance the appearance and style of your home while adding value to your investment.

By Brian Lockhart

Tilemaster in Aurora is a one-stop store that features every product you will need to transform your home from ordinary to spectacular.

Their products include tiles and floor and wall coverings for the bathroom, kitchen, living spaces, and entrances. They also have the items you need to remodel a fireplace or outdoor recreation area.

This includes all the specialty tools and associated products needed to properly install tiles and related fixtures. They service home owners and do-it-yourselfers as well as the construction industry who rely on their expertise, and quality products.

Almost the full line of tiles are imported from Europe where there is a history of craftsmanship in making the designs and producing quality tiles for home, industry, and business.

Tilemaster began as a retail store and has now grown to include three locations and a large distribution centre in Aurora.

Owned and operated by Ton Holten, and his son Dave Holten, this is a family business that takes pride in providing their customers with the finest products, quality service, and unmatched selection.



Ton started Tilemaster in 1981 after immigrating to Canada from the Netherlands.

Previously he had been involved in the trucking industry in Europe and had made contacts in the business world that encouraged him to continue in business in North America.

"We started on Industrial Parkway," Ton explained of beginning of the company. "We built the store in 1981 – it was 7,000 square feet. We opened on April 11, of that year. We owned a trucking company in Europe and we very much involved in the industry," he said of his start in the business. "We had an office in Italy and did a lot of transport of tiles from Italy to Spain, Germany, Holland, and Belgium. In 2006 we opened the Barrie store, and in 2011 we opened a store in Kitchener."

Dave Holten, has been with the company full-time since 1993.

"We are a family run business," Dave said. "We serve both residents and contractors. Our customers will come into the store to look around and choose what they need. They will look at a variety and select the tiles they like. Most contractors already know what they need and they will pick up what they want and the supplies, like cements and mortars to go with it. We have a lot of customers that are do-it-yourselfers, that do the work themselves."

A walk through the Tilemaster store and showroom on Mary St. in Aurora, reveals a large, well-lit facility that is a home designer's dream. It contains thousands of products of every style imaginable.

If you are planning a renovation, remodel, or new build, visit Tilemaster to see how they can help your home look its best.

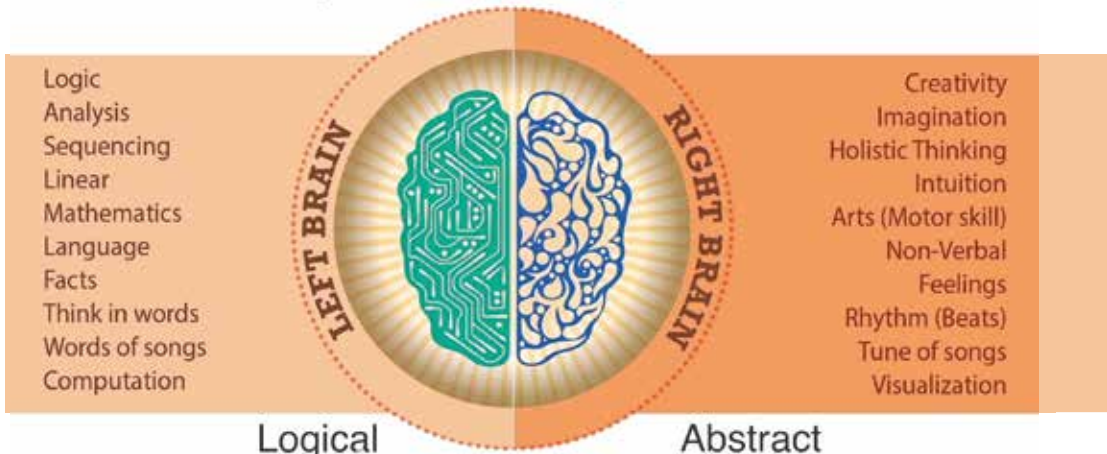
The Tilemaster retail store is located at 125 Mary St. in Aurora.

You can visit on-line at: www.tilemastercanada.com, or inquire by telephone at: 905-841-2333.



Stimulating Whole Brain Development with

UCMAS



Mental Math Program Helping Youth to Unlock their Potential

By Sam Odrowski

Children can sometimes look towards mathematics very hesitatingly. However, a local Abacus-based mental math program is shifting that perception, while building lifelong skills at the same time. UCMAS Aurora teaches children ages 5-14 how to do mental math using an Abacus, which further develops their cognitive skills like concentration, memory power, multi-tasking, and problem-solving.

With its unique Abacus training method, the UCMAS program stimulates both sides of the brain – the left side which focuses on logic and reasoning as well as the right side which focuses on creativity. This ensures the whole-brain development of children.

"We're always using only 10% of our brain at any given time. The UCMAS program pushes children towards using the untapped brain capabilities," says Baljit Bardai, UCMAS Director of Education Services. "Children are like sponges and they can intake more than we can ever think

of. They have so much potential that can be unlocked."

The program helps build a child's ability in handling numbers, which allows them to see mathematics from a new perspective, with a more positive attitude. They also learn how to multi-task, think critically, boost their memory, become more observant, and enhance their focus.

"I always say to the parents, math is a by-product, the real essence that you're giving your children is a gift of lifelong skills and confidence with UCMAS," says Bardai. "I truly believe there's a lack of math skills for our kids at this day and age... and I don't think we are preparing them for the future."

UCMAS is aiming to close that gap by replacing calculators with Abacus in children's hands, developing cognitive skills, and sharpening their minds.

As students move through the eight levels at UCMAS, they learn 42 different formulas to add, subtract, multiply, divide, and find



the square root of numbers in their heads. The classes are comprised of speed writing and jumbled dictation which help to increase problem-solving skills and efficiency when writing.

The new skills UCMAS students develop through the curriculum help them immensely in the speed at which they can complete their work. "In the beginning when they start, it might take 12 minutes to get through a work page, but at the end of the level they're doing the entire page in just two minutes," says Bardai.

COVID-19 had disrupted UCMAS' in-class learning, but that option is now available to parents who want their kids to have classroom experience. Currently,

UCMAS is teaching many of its students from home but everyone has adapted quite well, says Bardai. She notes that parents have nothing to lose and a lot to gain from testing out UCMAS, which is offered at a lower price than other math programs in the area.

"Register, do a trial class and see how it feels for your child," Bardai says. "Right now, we have an ongoing promotional offer, and children can avail two weeks of free Abacus training on enrollment."

83 First Commerce Dr E1,
Aurora, ON L4G 0G2
(647) 558-2608
www.ucmas.ca

"Quarterbacks of Care"

join team at Aurora Wellness Clinical Pharmacy



By Brock Weir

Family doctors are often your first point of contact for medical care. They can treat you directly or use their vast knowledge to direct you where to go. Locally, however, family doctors are in increasingly short supply, but the Aurora's Wellness Clinical Pharmacy has stepped up to help fill the gap.

Specializing in providing complete care for the community, family doctors were the one element missing from their practice on Yonge Street, just north of Aurora Heights Drive. But that is a thing of the past with the addition of Doctors Qi Jiang and Andrew Bi to the team.

"Family doctors are the quarterbacks of care," says pharmacist Jeffrey Tso, who co-founded Wellness Clinical Pharmacy alongside Thomas Huang and Kai Ye. "Without them triaging and moving you to the right places for your care and also treating you from the ground floor, everything falls to pieces."

This is a philosophy that is very much in line with Dr. Bi.

"We are the first contact in primary care in everything from cradle to grave," he says. "Family medicine is very important and I am a huge advocate of it. The family doctor is the first meeting place between patient and health care."



Dr. Jiang shares this view.

Recently looking for opportunities to plant professional roots, she says she was attracted to Aurora as a growing community.

"It's a great place to have a new practice, learning more about the community with this growing need," she says, referencing the "exodus" of family doctors from the area, many of whom are hanging up their stethoscopes in retirement.

Dr. Bi happened into Wellness Clinical Pharmacy quite by chance, stopping into look around. When he met with Ye, Huang and Tso, he was struck by their "dedication to customer care" and "knew this was a place I would be happy in."

Dedication to customer care has been the mantra for Wellness Clinical Pharmacy since it opened at the height of the global pandemic.

A tough time for any new business to open their doors, they found their niche in their holistic approach to health care, including the vision of having doctors on site.

"The most important thing is access to healthcare and having a doctor in the facility on a family practice basis really allows patients to come in and have their issues addressed," says Ye.

Adds Huang: "We want to provide comprehensive care and that is what we strive to provide, with our motto: better care."

As much as opening their doors in the middle of COVID-19 has been a challenge, it has also provided Wellness Clinical Pharmacy the opportunity to stand apart from the crowd.

Since they welcomed their first client, they have administered more than 1,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccine and developed unique services to help customers navigate the complex and ever-changing world the virus has wrought.

They provide a variety of COVID testing, travel certificates, and even purchased a specialized machine to provide near-instantaneous results for people travelling to the United Kingdom, the United States and China. They identify the tests each client needs to clear in order to get to their destination, and help them figure out the best way to coordinate all the fine details.

"We're helping patients navigate a confusing environment, one which may not be crystal clear with all the different types of testing," says Ye. "There is a lot of nuance and we're helping a lot of patients navigate that."

Wellness Clinical Pharmacy is located at
15450 Yonge Street, Unit 2 - 3.

For more information, visit wellnessclinicalpharmacy.com.



Lead the social, worry-free retirement you deserve in Aurora

When you imagine life in a retirement residence, what do you think of? Do you visualize friends safely gathered to discuss the latest news over a cup of coffee? A home-style meal served hot and fresh? Exercising, gardening, or watching a movie in the theatre? How about getting to know and trust people who have your health and happiness in mind, so you don't have to worry about things like your personal safety, cooking, cleaning, or getting the assistance you need to lead each day to the fullest?

This is the reality of life at Chartwell Retirement Residences, where life is centred on social connections, caring staff, and worry-free services. We offer local seniors and their families a choice of beautiful retirement communities in Aurora to call home, each featuring their own distinct character and combination of services, care, and amenities.

Helping keep seniors safe

At Chartwell, our highest priority is the safety of our residents and staff. We continue to maintain strong infection prevention and control protocols for the protection of all who live and work in our homes, including requiring PPE for all staff, screening visitors and staff, regular cleaning and disinfection, and continued education. Together with our high vaccination rates amongst residents and staff, these safety measures empower you to live life to the fullest in our homes, including enjoying visits and outings with your family and friends.

How you want to live in your retirement years

One of the most valued aspects of life at our retirement residences is our social experiences. Regardless of whether you are outgoing or shy, here you can choose from a wide range of programs that can benefit you physically, socially, and even emotionally, including exercise classes, themed meals, clubs, and outings. Whether your goal is to meet new people, keep active or try your hand at something new, our optional experiences are here to complement your lifestyle—not change it—so you can lead your retirement years exactly how you'd like to.

The right retirement residence for you in Aurora



In the heart of Aurora is **Chartwell Park Place**, known for its vibrant community atmosphere, excellent amenities, and engaging experiences. In addition to delicious and nutritious meals, long-term staff who get to know your individuals needs and preferences, and a wide range of care services, you'll love all the walkable amenities available on Yonge Street, including coffee shops, eateries, places of worship and the town's public library.



In the Bayview-Wellington neighbourhood, nestled along the arboretum behind Aurora Town Hall, is **Chartwell Hollandview Trail**. Offering both independent supportive living and assisted living lifestyles, Chartwell Hollandview Trail is an elegant retirement community with a full-service experience. State-of-the-art amenities like a saltwater pool, gardens with raised beds for planting your own flowers and vegetables, as well as well-appointed suites will make you feel right at home in this beautiful residence.



Last, but not least, just south of the Aurora border on bustling Yonge Street is **Chartwell Oak Ridges**. Their location can't be bested, as you have access to many walkable amenities like banks, shopping, and brunch spots, as well as parks, walking paths and nearby Lake Wilcox. With an inviting ambiance, attractive architecture, and modern amenities—not to mention independent living and assisted living care support—life at Chartwell Oak Ridges is both comfortable and convenient.

Interested in learning more about the lifestyle at Chartwell?

Our Retirement Living Consultants are here to support you or a loved one in your exploration of retirement living. Call **1-844-727-8679** to book a personalized tour of our retirement residences today.



Think you know
RETIREMENT LIVING?

THINK AGAIN.

Life at Chartwell is centred on **social connections, caring staff and worry-free services** that can make life better.

Life is Better, Together.

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CHARTWELL HOLLANDVIEW TRAIL
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CHARTWELL OAK RIDGES
12925 Yonge Street, Richmond Hill



9ROUND

30 MINUTE KICKBOX FITNESS EXPERIENCE

By Brian Lockhart

OPEN HOUSE SATURDAY

September 18th 8am-1pm

Everyone is welcome to try us out! Live DJ, Local vendors, Door prizes, challenges, and your chance to win a 6 month membership! Come dressed for a killer workout and let's kick it together!

Members appreciate the fact that they can plan a workout around their busy schedule rather than try to make time according to the gym's schedule.

The 9Round system is a vigorous kickboxing based workout that takes you through nine stations in the studio.

It takes about 30 minutes to complete one full rotation.

Each station features a different form of full body strength, conditioning, coordination, and physical exertion that burns calories, makes you stronger, and improves your overall health.

The 9Round system was developed by a former professional kickboxer, Shannon 'The Cannon' Hudson, who opened a small gym and worked to develop a highly successful routine that could be performed in a relatively short period of time but producing big results.

And now with almost 1000 locations worldwide, kickboxing fitness is becoming one of the fastest growing trends in the fitness industry.

"We're a 30 minute total body kickboxing

workout," Marina explained. "It's a circuit gym. You spend three minutes at each round doing a specific drill. There's a timer that indicates the start and end of each round. This workout is designed to be exactly what you need in a 30 minutes time period. An effective workout that produces results is not about the amount of time you spend in a gym, it's about the intensity in that time."

Each round features a drill that focuses on a particular exercise, muscle group, or skill.

Round one is always a jump rope – "That's a boxer's best cardio," Marina said.

Round two provides weight lifting.

Moving to the other rounds, you will be up against a punching bag to improve agility, a heavy bag, and a bag called a 'wrecking ball' that allows for moves like uppercuts, shin kicks, and round kicks.

The speed bag helps with coordination, speed, and rhythm, and there is always a training specialist on the floor who will make sure your form is correct, will teach you the proper techniques and will push you to reach your fitness goals faster than you can on your own.

To finish off, you move into the ninth round where the focus is on core and ab work.

For women especially, the skills learned can translate into self defence moves.

"It's fitness that is centred around the kickboxing concept," Marina explained. "You are going to learn lots of skills. Our certified kickboxing specialists will teach you boxing and kickboxing combinations using equipment such as focus pads, Thai pads and kick shields. One thing I want to point out – we don't hit you – you practice hitting with a trainer or on our various heavy bags. You're not here just to do sit ups, push ups, and lift weights. You're learning boxing and kickboxing skills that will build your strength and confidence and help you with other aspects of your life."

All of the trainers at the studio are fully trained and certified by 9Round and you will be with a Certified Kickboxing Specialist at every visit.

"We provide personal accountability," Marina explained. "Your goals are our goals. When you become a member here we don't just leave you on your own. We make sure you come in and do your workout – we want you here. We keep you accountable and keep you on that path towards your fitness goals."

The other benefit of joining a smaller studio like 9Round Aurora, is the added advantage of safety. With the challenge times we live in, 9Round Aurora is able to keep their studio clean and sanitized better than the bigger box gyms can. Trainers clean and sanitize equipment and floors in between rounds so members and trainers are kept safe at all times.

Your first visit is always FREE so you can try out the circuit and experience the benefits of the workout before you commit.

9Round - 30 Minute Kickbox Fitness Aurora is located at 233 Earl Stewart Drive, Unit 13, in Aurora.

They can be reached by telephone at 905-251-4729, or visit the 9Round website at: 9round.ca/aurora to book your FREE workout now!



9ROUND

30 MIN KICKBOX FITNESS



The 30 minute full body WORKOUT

This isn't your typical gym where you have to book time, book a trainer, and hope you get a workout that burns calories and makes you stronger.

At 9Round Fitness in Aurora, you workout based on your schedule, not based on class times, because there aren't any!

9Round is a nine-step kickboxing style circuit format where you will feel yourself getting stronger and fitter, and you will learn some self defence techniques that will improve your self-confidence.

SPARKLE PHARMACY'S

Michael Khalil is living his dream committing himself to the Aurora community

In April 2017, pharmacist Michael Khalil purchased Sparkle Pharmacy, located at 14800 Yonge Street in Aurora with the goal of turning it into a community-first pharmacy. Over the last few years, he has done just that with Sparkle Pharmacy.

The Aurora resident actually lives a few streets away from the pharmacy and has a passion for the community and getting to know everyone who comes into the pharmacy. He's driven by his love for Aurora and the people in it.

"I'm a local guy, so a lot of the patients and people in the community know me from the store as well as just seeing me out and around with my family walking the dog and stuff like that," he said. "I describe it as being like it's out of a movie as the local pharmacist; it's a cliché, but it's cute that while I'm out with my family seeing people who know me because I run Sparkle."

Wanting to do the most he can for the community he loves, Michael has helped bring a clinic next door to his pharmacy to ensure the people of Aurora have everything they need to be at their best.

The Aurora South Medical Centre is currently open on a limited basis as Dr. Vasuki Coomaran transitions from her practice in Oshawa.

"As of now, they're only open Tuesday to Thursday during her transition, but she's establishing a brand-new practice here," he said. "She's going to have a walk-in and family practice and is accepting new patients that will be open full time come October. Our goal within six months to expand with more doctors and other health professionals



By Rob Paul

and slowly build the practice. I've been advocating to get a doctor in that space for years, knowing it's a fantastic location to have a clinic and people are used to it (a clinic used to be located in the same spot). Some of the clinics around here are impacted by different variables that are less inclusive for patients and this location is perfect for convenience and accessibility."

Another positive in the situation is that Khalil being a champion of having not just a clinic, but the right clinic open next to his pharmacy, is that he wants to do everything he can to provide a friendly and comfortable experience for patients.

"Dr. Coomaran is a very hard-working and empathetic doctor that will be great for this location. We opened up a large waiting area in the pharmacy so people would have ample space while waiting for the doctor," he said. "I know in the past the clinic was getting a bit dark and dingy with a small waiting area, so we wanted to do the opposite and make it extremely bright and inviting with a large clean space. We want everyone to feel comfortable when they come to the clinic, and when you see a doctor, you don't want to be in an uninviting space, you want it to be bright and clean."

Not only did Michael want to ensure there was a clinic in the area for residents, but he wanted to make sure that he and the doctor would be able to easily work with patients guaranteeing the best possible care and comfortability for them.

"Generally, it's traditional for a pharmacy to be married to a clinic because one hand feeds the other," he said. "Luckily for me when I took over in 2017, the clinic had been gone for a few years and the clientele that were coming to Sparkle were already our loyal foundation and this allowed me to be less desperate to invite any doctor to come operate the clinic. You want the right fit and being a resident and business owner in Aurora, I knew it had to be the right fit because you need a strong collaboration between pharmacy and clinic. Now it's nice to be able to refer within rather than refer out, which comes back to the importance of collaboration for providing care. We're all trying to be a team together—patient, doctor, and pharmacy."

In April 2017, pharmacist Michael Khalil purchased the pharmacy located at 14800 Yonge Street in Aurora with the goal of turning it into a community-first pharmacy. Over the last few years, he has done just that with Sparkle Pharmacy.

Outdoor education more important now than ever at Pickering College



By Brock Weir

“I believe there is no limit to what can be taught outdoors”

“We recognize that Middle School students are in the process of developing their independence and to be able to do that successfully they need a certain skillset. In Junior School, they are moving through the program, they are getting a ton of support, parents are still involved. In Middle School, the parents have to take a step back and when that step-back happens we want the students to be taking the initiative. To take the initiative, they need some structure, some guidance and some skills to do that.”

When students enter Grade 6, Ms. Clement says that many are starting to have “more things happening in their world” and, therefore, more things they have to organize and tackle. The tools imparted in the program allow students to do so effectively and efficiently, whether it is studying or getting ready in the morning.”

“A lot of students [in Middle School] don’t have those skills yet, so by the time we start moving through Grades 6, 7, and 8, they are well prepared for the Grade 9 program where they are fully independent and ready to go. It is a ‘scaffolding’ approach where we’re trying to give them that structure and guidance.”

Results of the program are celebrated every year through Pickering College’s Showcase of Learning, which are student-led conferences where they share with their parents the projects they have been working on, as part of the Global Leadership Program – selecting three things they are most proud of from the school year – and the skills they have been developing along the way.

And many of these skills can be imparted outdoors.

“I believe there is no limit to what can be taught outdoors,” says Ms. Clement. “Our Grade 7s write suspenseful short stories, ghost stories in the fall, and use the outdoor classroom to read their story to their classmates. They could do this in a classroom space, but being out in nature, sitting under the trees and everything adds that extra element to what they are doing to be enhanced with the delivery in that space.”

“For Middle School, it allows our students to be active. Our program is incredibly engaging and challenging to begin with, but being outdoors impacts the student’s mindset, making their thinking more creative and limitless.”

Independent Co-educational Day and Boarding School Since 1842 | JK to University Preparatory
16945 Bayview Avenue, Newmarket, ON

905-895-1700 ext. 259
admission@pickeringcollege.on.ca

A grey sky, a chill in the air, a coldness punctuated by the crackle of a nearby fire.

It’s an evocative scene for anybody, but for a student sharing a story with their peers, you couldn’t ask for better atmosphere.

Serving as a backdrop for creative writing is just one of the many benefits of taking the traditional classroom outdoors. Although they couldn’t have foreseen the long-term benefits when Pickering College maximized these opportunities on their expansive Newmarket campus and their nearby outdoor education property, they have served the co-educational independent school well in the midst of a global pandemic.

“One of the most impactful parts of the pandemic has been that people have been realizing more and more the need to be outside and that the outdoors is such a great place for our health and wellness,” says Julie Clement, Pickering College’s Director of Middle School.

“We have always valued that at Pickering College, but we have added more outdoor time over the course of the past year and this was such a benefit to our students.”

The more time they spent outdoors, Ms. Clement says, the more productive their time was indoors.

They were more focused and, sure in the knowledge there would be more opportunities to go outdoors, able to cast off any feelings of being restricted, driven by the desire to re-connect with nature.

Throughout their Bayview Avenue campus, the school installed three fire pits this year so this time outside could be maximised even in colder months. There is a full outdoor learning classroom and other places where students can sit for lessons or go for breakout groups.

Trips to Blue & Silver Farm, where an Outdoor Educator works with homeroom and departmental teachers on interdisciplinary projects, not only adds life to science projects, particularly lessons related to biodiversity, but it even allows for mock survival missions and opportunities for history to come to life through battle re-enactments and more.

“The students love it there and it is probably one place that they ask to go to the most,” says Ms. Clement.

Whether outdoors or indoors, Pickering College is focused on giving students the tools they need to be successful learners at any grade.

In their Middle School, they have developed a “Learn to Learn” program designed to teach students the fundamentals of collaboration and organization.

“At the beginning of the year, we try and teach the foundational skills that students are going to need to stay organized, take down information and to ask a good question – and I think that is probably one of the most important things of learning: how to formulate a question where you’re going to get the information you’re trying to figure out,” says Ms. Clement.



PICKERING COLLEGE

Learning For Life. Creating The Future.





Neighbourhood Network continues to “spread joy, not germs” in challenging times

By Brock Weir

When you’ve worked tirelessly for more than a decade on connecting community volunteers with the organizations and individuals who need a helping hand the most, what can you do when a pandemic hits and those all-important face-to-face interactions are limited?

For Aurora’s Neighbourhood Network, it was a matter of “spreading joy, not germs.”

#spreadjoynotgerms has been a mantra for the organization since the start of the pandemic.

It was originally launched as a way to share photos on various social media platforms on what people were doing to stay positive during a very unsettling time, but it has grown into so much more.

Building on this foundation, Neighbourhood Network encouraged their roster of volunteers – and, indeed, the whole community – to get out of their homes safely and do something positive for their neighbours and the people around them.

Some teens helped out in their neighbours’ gardens, picked up an instrument to play music for seniors, others even developed new skills in the kitchen, sharing the fruits of their labour with others.

The outreach has been a “huge success,” says Erin Cerenzia, Manager of Neighbourhood Network.

As they got into the rhythm of the new normal, Neighbourhood Network harnessed the power of their volunteer base to do even more.

Recognizing that the pandemic has only exacerbated the issue of food insecurity throughout York Region, they partnered with local food banks to address their most urgent needs and volunteers – including students – fanned out to check items off these lists, encourage at the same time to post photos making deliveries to their local food banks using the same hashtag to spread the word.

There was no shortage of creativity either as Neighbourhood Network encouraged people to paint, draw and sketch artwork for residents in seniors’ communities and long-term homes. The results saw thousands of pieces of artwork pour into Neighbourhood Network which were, in turn, distributed to recipients who needed a ray of sunshine in their day.

“It is a way to spread joy and positivity in a challenging time,” says Ms. Cerenzia.

This formula kept Neighbourhood Network in good stead through the early days of the pandemic and they want to keep the momentum going as they turn their attention to another uncertain fall and holiday season.

“In a typical world, Neighbourhood Network runs various conferences, workshops, and learning opportunities for its registered charitable partners in person but, like every organization, we have pivoted into offering virtual learning sessions,” says Ms. Cerenzia. “The beauty of this is we have been able to do more for the partners in our community.”

Neighbourhood Network’s next Virtual Learning Session will take place September 23 with a focus on how to plan for the upcoming holiday season when many like organizations are gearing up for gift drives.

“These gift drives are so necessary for organizations to be able to provide support and resources to the clients they serve,” she says. “We will have a gift card drive, as well as online shopping, on behalf of a charity for the holiday season. We want to get ahead of this and make sure the charities we work with at Neighbourhood Network have the resources and support they need going into the holidays.”

While the holiday season is still a couple of months away, there are other opportunities you can help.

In lieu of the traditional Magna Hoedown, Neighbourhood Network this month is hosting a virtual silent auction which will benefit the 30 recipients of the Magna Hoedown Community Fund.

Closing this Saturday, September 18, you can bid on more than 125 items, all from the comfort of your own home, to help raise thousands for organizations in need.

“There really is an incredible variety of items, from outstanding experiences, to sports and entertainment, to dining, things for book lovers, pet lovers – there is something for everyone and you don’t want to miss it!” says Ms. Cerenzia.

To participate, visit Hoedown.ca.



Vicky McGrath

Here to Help Home Care Services has been providing private home care for clients in York Region since 2016.

Owners Vicky and Jeff McGrath started the home care business after Vicky’s mom, who had Alzheimer’s, passed away.

“Home care provides a choice for your loved one and if we had known about home care during my mom’s illness, we would have made different choices around her care. Home care would have provided respite for my dad, who was my mom’s primary caregiver, and provided a better quality of life for my mom.” Vicky stated.

“We are here to help your loved one remain safe and healthy at home, this is our core purpose,” says McGrath, “and this includes doing whatever is needed such as personal care, medication management and meal preparation, household management, laundry, errands and pet care! We also specialize in dementia care and palliative care and work closely with community partners to ensure the best circle of care for clients. Clients want to stay in their own home with their familiar belongings and

pets and we are here to help. Especially for those with dementia, remaining at home provides stability and comfort as well as peace of mind for families.”

We have been extremely fortunate that none of our clients or caregivers have had COVID during the pandemic, thanks to our strong infection control practices. Being accredited through Accreditation Canada has been a great benefit to ensure we follow the best care practices for our clients. Our staff have a daily screener accessed through our app-based care management system and are provided with all necessary PPE.

We also have wonderful, caring staff who bring kindness and happiness to clients with every visit. One thing our clients really missed during COVID was going to the nail salon to get their nails done.

Vicky recently became a Color Street stylist so that clients can have a manicure any time they wish with no drying time!

Color Street 100% nail polish strips are a game changer for elderly clients and clients with dementia who now don’t have to wait for their nail polish to dry!

For more information about Color Street, visit <https://www.colorstreet.com/vickymcgrath>

Here to Help Home Care Services is an Aurora Chamber of Commerce member.

Vicky is an avid volunteer in the community, currently volunteering for Kerry’s Place Services for Autism and Vicky is thrilled to be training for the

Ironman World Championships in Kona, Hawaii, 2022.

For more information on this exciting journey and to follow along on Vicky’s progress, visit <https://ironmanfoundation.donordrive.com/participant/Vicky-McGrath>

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Please follow us on Facebook and Instagram!

Home hardware building centre

By Brock Weir



Exceptional Customer Service in Exceptional Times

After more than a year-and-a-half at home, you might think you've done all the home improvements you can think of.

Aurora Home Hardware, a family-owned business for more than 50 years, prides itself on being friendly and knowledgeable. Home Hardware has always been a destination for do-it-yourself (DIY) customers and as people grew tired of the same four walls in the first few months of 2020, the store saw a surge in customers looking to spruce up their home – a trend which shows little sign of slowing down.

"Aurora Home Hardware's philosophy of buying Canadian and sourcing supplies as locally as possible has made us a unique store. As a result, we have won the Readers' Choice Award year after year as the best hardware store in York Region for our customer service and family atmosphere. For that, we give credit to our wonderful customers."

What sets Home Hardware apart is the time they take with the customer in insuring they find exactly what they are looking for.

Some of the products they carry are Napoleon barbecues, backyard pizza ovens, and the STIHL line.

"We have Napoleon barbecues

but, due to COVID, our stock is limited. Shop early for best selection and needs. Also added this year, we have backyard pizza ovens in different sizes and styles – sourced locally and working with a Canadian company. Visit our store for great selections and we will answer all your questions and needs.

"We have also added a STIHL dealership for contractors' seasonal needs with an on-site consultant and repair person. This includes knowledgeable staff who can share their expertise with customers."

This philosophy of customer service with Canadian products extends to home improvements, where Home Hardware takes great pride in sourcing the best quality and variety of Canadian-made kitchens, bathrooms and exterior/interior doors.

"We have two kitchen consultant designers on site who have years of experience and expertise and are able to find all of your kitchen needs. The same goes for our window department. With North Star windows on board as a supplier, they are all providing customers with new options for windows with a trend away from wood towards more durable vinyl and triple-paned, well-insulated installations."

Thank you for your ongoing support over the past 50 years

KEY ADVANTAGE TEAM: Excited to help you home



By Brock Weir

Selling your home is a very personal decision. It's a decision that requires a lot of care and planning.

They are not just top of mind issues for the property owner, they are concerns shared by the Key Advantage Team. But in a global pandemic, sometimes that in-person touch is easier said than done.

As Ontario continues to re-open, the Team, led by realtors Susie Strom and Caroline Baile, are excited for a return to normalcy as they get back out to not only sell a property to potential buyers, but highlight all the features our wonderful community has to offer.

"We want to promote all the community has to offer, not just the house," says Susie Strom, who works alongside daughter Lindsay Strom out of their Newmarket Royal LePage office.

Many newcomers to Aurora are just that, adds Lindsay, rather than potential buyers moving within the Town.

"We appreciate the opportunity to see these buyers in person and meet them in our own listings so we can let them know all that Aurora has to offer," says Lindsay.

Since the start of the global pandemic, the Key Advantage Team has been quick on their feet pivoting to many "new normals." They met with clients on virtual platforms, embraced electronic signatures to make sure transactions could take place safely and seamlessly, and have become experts on the protocols, procedures and PPE required to make showings happen.

But, at the same time, these new platforms and methods have allowed them to be more in touch with their clients than ever before, as their ultimate goal is to ensure ease in every transition from buying, selling and investing.

"We wanted to make sure everyone really understood what was going on and felt well-represented," says Lindsay. "Communication became even more paramount because you're working so closely together but so distanced apart."

Adds Susie: "We had a lot of clients who were so relieved at how well the transaction went and how everything was managed. Because we've experienced such a wonderful market, the turnaround time for sales in the past year has been quick. We tried to position houses so they were priced sharply and were mostly selling within a week. I think, if anything, sellers were happier this past year more than any other."

The Key Advantage Team has seen significant shifts in markets over the last 12 months. At this time last year, they saw a lot of clients looking at real estate as investment opportunities, often putting the homes they've purchased on the very hot renters' market shortly thereafter.

But more recently, they are seeing these investors sell up, providing opportunities for families to plant permanent roots in the community – and many families looking for the chance to trade up from small homes to larger residences.

The trend has only served to further underscore their philosophy that "home is more than a four-letter word. It is a feeling, a safe place, a sense of belonging, and somewhere to break bread and make memories."

Looking ahead to the fall, the Team suspects there will be a surge in housing stock on the market.

"Families who maybe weren't ready to make the move during uncertain times are going to be prepared to do that in this upcoming market," says Susie, noting that in the coming months they believe there won't be such a gap between the inventory of homes on the market compared to buyers and sellers looking to get into it. "It is a wonderful time to be selling and I think just in terms of the level of risk or fear that there was previously has been eliminated, more people being vaccinated and things opening up, it is definitely a more comfortable time to be transacting real estate."

And they're ready to make the transaction not just as comfortable but smooth and safe as possible, driven to ensure your biggest investment is handled with knowledge, professionalism and care.



Caroline Baile & Susie Strom



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THE MEADOWS of Aurora

TURNING THE MEADOWS' DREAM INTO REALITY

By Kinjal Dagli-Shah



Ruth Street and Simon Frankruyter in the Meadows stunning new Dining Room that overlooks the site's picturesque pond.

The Meadows of Aurora is a project born from a dream. That's likely why it's a dream-come-true for existing as well as over 120 new residents who arrived in April and May. They can all thank Simon Frankruyter, whose vision and goal to build a seniors community where faith and friendship would make for harmonious living has become a reality.

Simon was one of the leading and founding members of a faith-based group that felt the need for a community in York Region that would be especially tailored for seniors who are born out of a common Christian faith of respect and care for others. That was the start of the dream 12 years ago.

Today, Simon along with 365 others, now call the Meadows of Aurora their "home" and their "community". It's an amazing place that only keeps getting better as each phase is completed and becomes available to residents. Woodland Towers is the latest and has just been completed.

The Meadows, built on a sprawling 25 acres, of which half is protected forest that will be preserved for the community, the campus also features walking paths connected to the local trail system. "With the woodlands come wildlife, so on a regular basis it's not just birds we see, but deer, foxes, coyotes and turkeys," says Ruth Street who not only calls the Meadows home, but is also vice-chair of the board at the Meadows. "It's especially nice for people who have come from homes having large gardens, acreage or farm properties ...it feels like home very quickly."

Naturally, the Meadows of Aurora is a popular choice for seniors looking for a faith-based community amid the bounties of nature. Between the beautiful views of the pond and walking trails to the elegant dining room, great hall, bistro, salon & wellness centre, this is senior living at it's finest!

For older adults, studies have shown that physical activity in green spaces is linked to lower rates of depression, reduced stress, improved cognitive function and a better mood overall. At the Meadows of Aurora, this is easily accomplished. A Wellness Centre located in Woodland Towers,

offers residents services such as physiotherapy, optometry, audiology, foot care and much more. This convenient on-site feature is designed to offer residents one stop access to health care services.

The seniors' lifestyle community features book clubs, coffee hours, exercise groups and a number of resident-led activities, such as game nights, euchre and bridge. Neighbours can enjoy going out for dinner together with friends and choose their own level of activity and connection with others.

A key component of The Meadows success is its Aurora location in the heart of York Region. For Christian seniors who prefer to remain in their community and 'age-in-place', the Meadows provide a quality-oriented facility, while striving to meet the needs of a diverse group. The aim is to promote a caring Christian community and cultivate a supportive living environment. This was especially true during the last year as a very special, unique and caring environment was especially evident at the Meadows of Aurora. The seniors' community followed all public health protocols and kept finding creative ways to maintain a strong sense of community.

"We had many impromptu saxophone and piano concerts outside while residents were able to listen from their balconies," Street says. "Others exercised on the lawns and balconies while also listening to the music. It was just great!"

Many community members dropped off cookies or baking to one another and found ways to keep connected while staying physically apart.

But the Meadows journey isn't over quite yet, a new phase has recently launched—Park Tower is being offered at pre-construction pricing. Park Tower will add another 125 suites in the near future. For more information and to get in touch with the Meadows of Aurora team, please call 905 503-5560 or visit: <http://www.themeadowsofaurora.com/>

Periodically, suites in the Garden Tower come up for resale, so be sure to contact the Meadows of Aurora Sales Presentation Centre at 905-503-5560 to see what's available.



Turn your home into an

Oasis

BACKYARD POOL & SPA



By Brian Lockhart

Having your own backyard pool or spa and recreation area creates an oasis only steps from your home that will provide years of enjoyment.

The experts at Backyard Pool and Spa in Aurora can help turn your backyard into your own private resort.

They are a dealer of swim spas that combine a relaxing spa with a high-pressure jet system that allows you to swim against the current for an invigorating water work-out. You will never again have to go to a public pool to swim laps.

There is a full line up of relaxing American Whirlpool hot tubs by Maxx Spas that come in various sizes and a price range that can meet any budget.

Backyard Pool and Spa is much more than a pool and spa outlet. They have full pool service and products that include liners, heaters, pumps, and winter covers.

While the past year has been difficult, the staff at Backyard Pool and Spa continued to provide excellent service to their valued customers.

As the pool and related industries were designated as 'essential services' during the pandemic, trained staff ensured that customer's pools were kept in pristine condition during trying times to avoid any kind of contamination



that could have occurred if pools had been left unattended.

They are proud of the fact that they retained all of their staff when many other companies faltered and had to let people go.

During the past year they have been working hard to ensure the company has a high level of visibility. This includes a new website design and a new E-commerce site that makes finding products and production information easy and informative.

"We really want to thank our customers for being loyal – we really appreciate that," said sales representative, Richard West. "We are continuing to bring on new brands. We sell top of the line brands like Yeti, Big Green Egg, and Weber."

Store owner Don Smith along with his sons Alex and Josh and sister Gail makes Backyard Pool and Spa a true family business. Alex and Josh are third generation retailers in Aurora as Grandfather Eric owned a paint store on Yonge and was one of the founders of the Aurora Chamber of Commerce.

The store's current location is their third and largest showroom and warehouse.

"We have always been located in Aurora," Don explained. "This is our sixth year at this location – that's 28 seasons."

Over the years the store has branched out to offer many other outdoor related products.

"That's part of our success – for example, our barbecue sales," Don said. "We sell the Yeti whose line of drinkware and coolers are for camping and travelling. We have fire pits, both gas and wood."

A stroll through the showroom reveals a full line-up of inflatable paddle boards that go along with the outdoor theme of the store.

If you do own a pool, they have every conceivable product you will need to keep your water clean all summer long. The staff is friendly and knowledgeable and can help you make the right decisions when it comes to home pool care.

Visit the Backyard Pool and Spa showroom at 1 Vata Court, in Aurora, or visit the website at: www.backyardpoolandspa.ca, for a virtual tour of their line-up of pools, spas, and other outstanding products.

You can contact them via e-mail at: info@backyardpoolandspa.ca, or by telephone at: 905-713-2317.

Coconut Village

Nails Spa



Phiona Durrant



By Brock Weir

Coconut Village Nails Spa provides

Tropical Experience

at Yonge and Wellington

Phiona Durrant feels the joy as soon as a client comes through her doors.

The owner of Coconut Village Nails Spa, located on the southwest corner of Wellington and Yonge, can't quite explain the feeling, but from customer's feedback she can tell that they too leave with the same feelings after one of their signature treatments.

If word-of-mouth is any indication, she's hit on a winning formula – and a winning location – and Coconut Village continues to go from strength to strength.

"It's the same experience whether you're a 90-year-old sitting in my chair or a six-year-old coming in for our children's spa services: I want people to come in and feel the right energy, the ambiance is insatiable, the service is right, and they feel pampered and cared for – and making people feel great and cared for matters to me. It truly sets us apart," says Ms. Durrant.

Previously located on a second-floor unit on Wellington Street East, the recent move to Aurora's busiest intersection has been an unexpected "blessing" for the spa, which has seen a nearly-60 per cent uptick in new business.

"The presence is necessary, especially as a visible minority business owner," says Ms. Durrant. "The support from Aurora has been through the roof – equally from around York Region, and beyond: from Brampton, Toronto, Pickering. People coming from everywhere. I have clients who travel over an hour, every four weeks for the experience! "Besides, it's the perfect mini vacation escape, especially in this pandemic!" "Our experience come with just the right amount of reggae music to seal that tropical feeling."

Among the favourite "feel good" services Ms. Durrant offers are facials, waxing, manicures, pedicures special occasion spa party, girls night-out, couples retreat, mobile services for clients with accessibility concerns, and sell amazing in-house natural products, sugar scrubs, soap, and more.

"I especially love the pedicures. I find such honour and humility in "the washing" of someone else's feet and making them feel-good. My faith and upbringing surely influence that, she says.

People can be very particular or shy about their feet. Therefore, our private space, where services are mostly done one-one, offers the ideal comfort, and no one needs to feel embarrassed or uncomfortable. I serve a lot of people with different disabilities and they too value that this is a space where they can have a private experience.

"With so many other stresses of life where so many things are rushed, my ultimate desire is to make clients relax and prioritize self-care." That, I think is the greatest reason why people keep coming back," she says, before adding with a laugh, "other than cooking and feeding people!"

When clients leave, Ms. Durrant makes a point of not pressuring them into booking their next appointment. Instead, she wants them to reflect on their experience and book when they feel comfortable. Often those bookings come quickly on the heels of a stellar review on social media, a trend which has helped the spa gain considerable momentum.

"With little over 2+ years in business we have built a strong connection with our community and have developed a unique niche that they love. I am so humbled by the support of the community and my gratitude is important to express," she says.

For more on Coconut Village Nails Spa, and to book your appointment, visit coconutvillagenails.com.



By Rob Paul



Building character through Music

Music can unlock all kinds of possibilities for people who are willing to commit and embrace it, particularly at a young age, that's why Paul Mason opened the Aurora Music Academy in 2017.

He wanted to help nurture skill while building character through music.

Despite having been around for a few years, the Aurora Music Academy is still a relatively new music academy, but it has seen quick growth. After starting with 15 students, the Academy has grown to well over 300 and was billed as the fastest growing music school in York Region—the academy has also won the Consumers Choice Award two years in a row and the Readers' Choice Award this past year.

With 30 years of teaching experience under his belt, Mason saw an opportunity to show his students that anybody can succeed if they set goals and follow through while also instilling character skills like confidence, initiative, and teamwork in a fun and artistic environment.

When teaching students, Mason says rather than focus purely on one instrument, they teach students about the transferable skills in music so as they master their main instrument, they're actually developing the base ability to play a plethora of instruments.

"The premise of the school is to teach music with the intent of making lives better," he said. "We're trying to teach music so that kids learn their particular instrument very well, but we also want to introduce them to other instruments. We want it so that at the end of the day our students are advanced piano players after four or five years, but they're also guitar players and singers and percussionists. We want them to learn multi-skills and transferable skills that easily put you in a position to learn another instrument."

"We take one instrument, piano for example, and develop them there, but while we're teaching them, we focus on various skills. It's not just playing the piano; it's focusing on rhythm which is fundamental for the piano, but also fundamental to play guitar and drums. So, we focus on rhythm with the piano, but then we give them a ukulele and show them they can play the ukulele and they don't even know it because it's just about rhythm at the beginning."

The key aspect to showing students they can succeed is to keep the experience fun and Mason and his teachers do that through unique opportunities.

"We're constantly peppering in the fun element," he said. "What we actually do is that as we talk about rhythm, for example, we put a ukulele in their hand and show them

they can play and then invite them to come play with other kids. They'll show up and there will be two kids with ukuleles, another with a snare drum, another singing, and a guitarist—but they're all actually piano players—and it's not a rock jam, it's an exercise showing them how you can engage in music when you don't play any of these instruments.

"So, we're introducing them to new instruments when they don't even know it. The main goal is to show them where they are and where they're going, at the end I want every student to be able to play four instruments."

Mason is adamant that anyone can learn to play an instrument, but the challenge can be keeping students engaged and confident. That's why at the Aurora Music Academy, they use a specific goal setting system that's context is based solely on that individual.

"I want to do away with the idea that people can't do it," he said. "Some people can do it naturally, but the truth is anyone can do it because it's a skill that can be developed. Anyone can do it; anyone can be taught. We teach all instruments to all ages and something we do differently in addition to our private lessons, our programs include group classes as well. You have an opportunity to learn how to play with three other musicians—it's based on the principle of playing music with other people. We also have a goal setting system that nobody else uses, it's called a musical ladder."

"The musical ladder is a benchmark of progress and we set the criteria to the musician's skill the goals are set with the kids, and we choose a reasonable date for when those goals can be accomplished. To keep it fun, when they do the test, they get a wristband and certificate and for every other test they get a trophy that gets bigger and bigger. The parents love it because they're a part of the learning and know what's going on and we love it because there's direction and the kids know where they're going to be."



Aurora Music Academy
LIFE'S BETTER WITH MUSIC!

For more information on the Aurora Music Academy and the musical programs they offer, visit auroramusicacademy.ca or call 905-900-0094. The Academy is located at 330 McClellan Way (Unit 5).

