

Hillary House aims for something different with October 18 ball

By Brock Weir

Hillary House marked its' 150th anniversary with a celebratory ball; now a sprightly 151, organizers are not ready to hang up their dancing shoes just yet.

The second annual Hillary House Ball will be held next Friday, October 18 at the King Valley Golf Club.

Despite the change of venue from The Mansion (Dinardo's) last year, organizers promise once again the ball will help celebrate the national historic site's past while looking forward to the future.

"We wanted to do something a little different and we thought it was a first class venue," says Bill Albino, chair of this year's Ball, on the venue change. "We explored all the options around Aurora, including The Mansion, which did a good job for us last year, but given that there are so many galas nowadays, we wanted to differentiate ourselves a little bit.

"We wanted a place that could serve the quality of meal that we want, and could hold the size of crowd we wanted to attract. King Valley was very, very accommodating. Their aspiration is this will become an annual event and we will host it there for years to come."

Proceeds raised for this year's ball will go towards the ongoing restoration, maintenance, and preservation of Hillary House, the Yonge Street landmark which is Aurora's only National Historic Site. Organizers bill the event as a "great opportunity for York Region residents to contribute to the preservation of the area's heritage in a meaningful way."

At \$150 per ticket, guests will enjoy cocktails, appetizers, and get hands-on as well with specially selected medical and other historic artefacts from the Hillary House Collections "with gloves on, of course" with curator Catherine Richards.

Live music will once again be presented by the After Hours Big Band, a big hit at last year's ball, with a repertoire spanning much of the 20th century.

"We felt last year was really successful," says Mr. Albino. "People who came had a wonderful experience. People spoke really, really well of it and it made some money for us. As part of our long-range plan, the Aurora Historical Society (AHS) has a core [fundraising] priority and an event like this is a very good vehicle to raise money and, at the same time, raise visibility.

"This year, we're going to have our Town Crier make things interesting and entertaining. We have a fantastic silent auction, and we have had a lot of support from businesses, merchants, and restaurateurs around Town."

One big ticket item which might very well be in the silent auction is a trip to Scotland. Mr. Albino says the AHS has worked out a very "attractive" deal with tour operators in Richmond Hill and Newmarket to put together what could be the first in an ongoing series of auctions to celebrate the founding families behind Hillary House itself.

"The reason we want to do Scotland is the original owner of Hillary House, Dr. Geikie, was from Scotland," says Mr. Albino. "He built the house in 1862 and he sold it in 1869 to Dr. Strange from England who then sold it seven years later to Dr. Hillary from Ireland. There is a bit of a British Isles theme and it very much mirrors the overall early settlement of York Region. We are thinking of auctioning off something to Scotland this year, England next year, and Ireland the year after that. We're trying to tie a little bit of heritage to that."

Other items in the silent auction include original pieces of art, as well as limited edition prints from the estate of the late artist Dorothy Clark-McClure, who immortalized the building in countless pieces of art over her long and storied career.

?I would like people to leave feeling good about their contribution and this is the most enjoyable gala they have been to,? says Mr. Albino. ?Will that happen? I hope so.

?[Hillary House] has a tremendous place in the psyche of Aurora and I want people to come out and feel they have helped support it and, at the same time, they have enjoyed themselves tremendously and would want to do it again every year from now on.?