

## POLITICS AS USUAL: Yee-Haw!

**By Alison Collins-Mrakas**

I had the privilege to be a part of a pretty special community this past weekend ? the 700-strong group of Hoedown volunteers. And what a special group of dedicated people they are!

I have attended Hoedown many times but have never volunteered before. But this year, as I was working with Welcoming Arms - one of the community groups that received funding from the Hoedown ? I had the chance to help out at this year's Hoedown. And I am truly grateful for the opportunity as I got to witness first-hand the commitment and dedication of the fantastic people who put on this important community event.

First off it simply must be said that Magna International, Frank Stronach and the Stronach family, Neighbourhood Network and their entire team should be commended until the cows come home ? or the horses get back in the barn? - for the tremendous community support they provide year after year to Aurora and the great community of York Region.

Literally millions of dollars have been raised and handed out to tens of worthy community groups enabling the important work that they do to continue.

What other corporate entity can you think of that does this kind of thing? Puts on an enormous fundraiser at considerable corporate expense solely for the purpose of giving back? It really is remarkable.

But back to the volunteers. I was a newbie, but there were many, many volunteers and volunteer leads (the volunteers that oversee all the volunteers) that have been helping out a hoedown for years if not decades!

These are the people that make it all possible.

Without the army of volunteers to assist with everything from checking people in, to handing out drinks, to cleaning up the tables, it simply wouldn't be possible to put on an event of this size and magnitude. Well, it would be possible, but it would be extraordinarily expensive and the charities and monies given to them would diminish substantially as a result.

By donating their time and energy, the volunteers ensure that many worthy groups continue to benefit from the Hoedown. These 700 plus people work as a team to help deliver the event. And, truth be told, they all have a ball doing it.

I know I did!

Everyone has a smile on their face because ? aside from the fact that it's the Hoedown! - they all know they are doing something great for their community. So, what's not to smile about?

Personally, I've never had so much fun on ?environmental? duty in my life.

I've done stream clean-ups and graffiti clean-ups before, but garbage duty at the hoedown was great fun. Dancing away the night as I sorted garbage may sound odd, but I guess you had to be there. It was fun! (Just as an aside, the Hoedown is a zero waste event which means it aims for zero garbage going to landfill. To ensure that waste was disposed of properly, waste was collected from attendees and delivered to central sorting stations, where volunteers sorted it appropriately).

Great music, great volunteer company, and happy to work towards a great community event. Can I get a Yee Haw?