

"Stars" set to dance for "kids who can't"



By Brock Weir

They are familiar faces around Aurora and Newmarket, but if you've seen them lately, they might have a few beads of sweat on their brows ? and it has nothing to do with weather.

Local businesspeople, politicians and volunteers have thrown down the gauntlet and are now breaking in their dancing shoes for an Aurora-Newmarket installment of "Dancing With The Stars", which will take place Thursday, October 1 at King's The Manor at Carrying Place, all to benefit Easter Seals.

A popular fundraising event across Ontario for the organization, which raises money to support disabled children, this is a first for Aurora and Newmarket.

"We felt like it was time to come into this area because we heard we had lots of dancers here who would love to do a two-step for the kids who can't," says Charlene Myke of Easter Seals. "We are actually facing a bit of a shortfall in the area with some of our kids and we realised we needed to get an event going. We were lucky enough that it took off very quickly and we had so many people in the community step up and support the event."

Stepping up ? and lacing up ? are Paul Dutton of snap'd, Royal Woodworking's Donna Gerrits, Aurora Councillor Sandra Humfryes, Magna for the Community's Steve Hinder, long-time Newmarket volunteer Jackie Playter, Mike Rathke of M.R. Menswear, and business advocate Robin Taylor Smith.

"One reason [I signed up to participate] is I had a sister who was in a wheelchair and Easter Seals helped her out a lot," says Ms. Playter. "She has passed away now, but when she was young and we needed a wheelchair, they were there, and I felt like it was time to give back and that's why I got involved."

Ms. Playter is not alone. Many of the participants said they have been impacted in one way or another by the work Easter Seals performs in the community, whether they have seen the work in action themselves, or have heard first-hand accounts from those who have truly benefitted.

"It is an excellent cause," says Ms. Taylor-Smith. "I have done things with Special Olympics before and the more you can do, the better. It has always been a worthwhile endeavour."

Mr. Rathke, on the other hand, is a brain cancer survivor. His tumour affected the left side of his body, so dancing has been a bit of a challenge, but he's battling through it, finding himself improving slowly with every time he hits the dance floor.

"If I had a couple more months [to practice], it would be a lot better," he says. "I am fortunate to be around so that is why I am involved in this event.

Partnered with dance instructors from Artistica Ballroom Dance Studio, each of the "Stars" will debut their two dances at the October 1 event. Each performance will be critiqued and praised by a panel of judges. The seven dancers will then be whittled down to a top three - two of whom are selected by the judges and the third, who is selected by the voting crowd. Then, the last round comes right down to the judges.

As the "Stars" practice their moves, they are also actively fundraising through the cause, not only selling tables and tickets for the event, but collecting online pledges as well. If this wasn't enough, they are learning a thing or two on the dance floor as well.

"I have to tell you that in 30 years of policing, I had a number of very anxious moments, but I have never been more anxious than I am now. This isn't easy!" says Mr. Hinder. "One of the dances I am doing is the west coast swing (I didn't even know there was a west coast swing, let alone an east coast swing, but apparently there is). The other dance is called Peabody. I had to look these things up because the only dancing I know is moving around the floor at Hoedown.

"You really have to focus and do a lot of footwork. At the end of the day, I think people in the audience know we're doing this to support Easter Seal kids and I think there will be people there to say, darn, I wish I had gone up there."

Adds Mr. Dutton: "I like being involved and giving back to the community. If this was polo, I might not be so into it, but I like to dance and move, but having a chance to formally learn how to dance while supporting Easter Seals? I'm in. We are going to be bad, but I am working hard to be good!"

Dancing with the Stars Aurora-Newmarket hopes to raise \$60,000 for Easter Seals. Funds raised will largely benefit their Send a Kid to Camp program which, when costs for personal care workers for the individual children is factored in, can often cost \$2,500 per child for 10 days. It will also raise vital funds for equipment and mobility devices.

To support the dancers of your choice with your vote - and your \$20 - visit www.easterseals.org/dancing-with-easter-seals-stars-newmarket-aurora.