

VOTE 2014: It might take a village to raise a child, but it takes more to fix a broken adult, says candidate David Heard



By Brock Weir

David Heard says he's always believed in the phrase, "It takes a village to raise a child," but it takes a lot more than that to "fix a broken adult."

Mr. Heard says he kept this in mind when considering whether to throw his hat in the ring as a Council candidate in this month's Municipal Election. It is not a rash decision. He wanted to run for Council before, but in the last election he was going back to school to become a social worker, and that trumped politics.

"I entered the race late," says Mr. Heard. "I felt empowered. There is no challenge you cannot overcome. I have had some adversity in my life, but I am not going to let it hold me back. I just wanted to make sure I had some commitments to programming with my employment and other things I am involved in, and I wanted to make sure my house was in order before I put my name on paper."

Mr. Heard, a long-time anti-bullying advocate within the Aurora community, also works for Kerry's Place Autism Services, mentoring kids and young adults living on the autism spectrum. Looking ahead to the remaining weeks in this election campaign, he says it is important to deliver a strong message to youth.

Paramount in this, he says, is the development of the Community Space for Youth, currently under construction at the Aurora Community Centre, which has been dubbed a "Youth Centre."

Providing a place for the youth of Aurora to call home is one thing, but it is quite another to actually enable them to take advantage of it, he says.

"The youth centre is a challenge right now," he says. "We have a big hurdle ahead of us [with] our youth being able to access that location. We have a lot of areas in the community, such as Regency Acres, where there are a lot of basement apartments and single parent families. If the parent is working, who is going to get that youth to the youth centre? Logistics are going to be a challenge. We need to come up with creative ideas to assist those who want to, need to, and would like to use that facility.

"If we are going to have trouble getting people there, how much harder is it going to be for people with accessibility needs?"

The principle of getting people where they need to go is not strictly related to the youth centre for Mr. Heard. Providing a foundation for Aurora to maximize its tourism potential is also something that is very important to him.

A long-time heritage advocate, Mr. Heard has previously spoken about the potential to turn the former site of Collis Leather into a community hub in a similar vein to Newmarket's Riverwalk Commons. Although it seems that ship has sailed, he is not letting the flame dim on his desire to establish a York Region Music Hall of Fame and amphitheatre in Aurora to make the Town a tourist destination.

His work on Aurora's Heritage Advisory Committee, where he has been the leading advocate to secure and preserve Aurora's pet cemetery at the south end of Town also underscores his point, he says, in that interest has been coming in from well outside of Aurora of people wanting to come and take a look.

"I do not want to see our taxpayers continually pay out for these projects," says Mr. Heard on looking for partners to make these ideas a reality. "The amount of money that was raised for the Children's Safety Village is an amazing template. There is no reason why we can't get the public engaged on tourism and heritage. We have some incredible stories and people that are connected to our community locally. Aurora was a small town, but tourism is an incredible gift that we need to harness."

As the campaign progresses, Mr. Heard says he sees his "voice" not only as a significant asset over the next two weeks, but also something that would be beneficial at the Council table. He first focused on public speaking as a Grade 2 student, encouraged by his teacher as a way of overcoming his own hearing challenges and building self-esteem. So far, the most exciting part of this campaign for him is standing on the floor of the Royal Canadian Legion where he had an impact.

"There I was standing in the same place that at 17-years-old I did a speech on people with disabilities back in 1979 on why, if given a chance, they could become community leaders," he says. "I want to be that strong voice on Council, but I also want to be the ear." While he says the last two Councils have been "troublesome," he has high hopes for the future.

"I have to believe that we will take the big step to make Aurora an incredible place to live, an incredible place to visit, and a great place to mentor our youth to be future leaders."