



The Aurora Chamber of Commerce team includes (front row) board chair Javed Khan and interim manager Sandra Watson, along with (left) communications and marketing specialist Crystal Walsh and Member Relations Ambassador Lorie Butkus-Hill.



Thousands jam Yonge Street on the first Sunday in June, during the annual Aurora Chamber Street Festival.



Aurora Chamber of Commerce

Gaining momentum, making an impact

Motivational speaker and writer Denis Waitley once said: “You must welcome change as the rule but not as your ruler.” Successful business people do this, responding proactively – rather than reactively – to a changing marketplace. So do the organizations that serve these businesses. Like the Aurora Chamber of Commerce.

This non-profit, which represents more than 600 members and the entire Aurora business community, has faced the challenges of recession, recovery and altered shopping patterns. And it has responded with a new direction and leadership that has enhanced their profile – and influence.

“We’ve always been relevant, but we’re playing from a greater position of strength than we were three or four years ago,” said board chair Javed Khan. “Now we’re being invited to the party. More and more people are reaching out to us for advice and with opportunities.”

This includes local government. The ACOC has taken a collaborative approach with the Town, which includes having Aurora’s CAO Doug Nadorozny actively involved with the board. This spirit of inclusiveness has also been extended to other organizations.

“We’ve introduced an ex-officio person on our board from Sport Aurora, said Javed. “Now we have someone from the sports and recreation community at our table. We firmly believe that local sports and business are a natural fit.”

The Aurora Chamber doesn’t yet have a full time CEO, but the volunteer board has been working hands-on with Chamber staff, including interim manager Sandra Watson. “Sandra has done an incredible job of revisiting our budget from a strategic perspective – we’re really managing our expenses,” noted Javed. “Our financials are moving in an extremely positive direction.”

As are networking events and other ways to expose businesses to a local audience.

“Last October we had our inaugural Tech Expo,” said Sandra. “We were really pleased with it, and so were the exhibitors and attendees. We’re delighted to be bringing this event back again in 2017.”

Also new is the Business Women’s Summit. Plans are for a half-day event with keynote addresses by professional women on areas that are of interest to women – like financial, health, business and education. Date and location are to be confirmed, but the event is planned for early October.

And the Business Excellence Awards are back, after a five-year hiatus. The committee is still working on awards criteria and other details, but the event is scheduled for November 16 at King’s Riding Golf Club.

Spring will see the return of the always-successful Aurora Chamber Home Show (Apr 21-23), which is celebrating its 30th anniversary. And on the first Sunday in June is the Aurora Chamber Street Festival.

This annual favourite brings 30,000 attendees to Yonge Street from Wellington St. to Murray Dr., with street performers, music, food and more than 500 vendors. And this year, there’s a new twist.

Event organizers will be working with Activate Aurora to expand the venue east towards Town Park. “It will be an ‘open streets’ concept involving sports and recreation,” said Javed. “Like three-on-three basketball, a baseball tournament – everything will be activity-based.”

Last fall, the ACOC launched a digital initiative: four reader-friendly newsletters that keep not only members, but the

business community informed – and connected.

The Aurora Business Advocate highlights the ACOC’s business advocacy efforts. The Aurora Business Network delivers curated business news and resources, including updates from business and government partners at the local, provincial and national levels.

The Aurora Chamber Insider features opportunities and resources to maximize your membership. And lastly, the Event Update and Reminder features more than 50 Chamber events – opportunities to network and grow your business.

The first three newsletters are published monthly; the Event Update is bi-weekly. All include a cost-effective advertising opportunity. Sign up on the Aurora Chamber website.

The ACOC is also active on social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube), offering additional channels to promote Chamber initiatives, deliver curated content – and promote members.

Chamber TV is a partnership with St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School. These student-produced, YouTube video segments present a variety of topics: Chamber news, upcoming events, advocacy update and membership benefits.

Aside from events, government advocacy, networking and marketing opportunities, Chamber membership comes with additional perks. Like discount programs with national and local partners, where savings can often cover the cost of membership. Some of these include Grand & Toy, Esso, Purolator and UPS.

One of the most popular is the Chambers of Commerce Group Insurance Plan that provides flexible and affordable coverage at stable rates.

“There are still more reasons to join the Chamber,” Javed added. “But you need to call us or drop by to find out everything we offer to help grow your business, expand your professional network – and get involved in the community. It’s an investment in your success.”