

Good start to a busy month

by BROCK WEIR

Summer is just around the corner and, ready to herald the season-to-be's appearance on horizon, is the sense that we're all in a rush to get there.

Don't get me wrong, this isn't necessarily the bad kind of rushing, but year after year around this time there feels to be a particular sense of urgency to get as much done as humanly possible before people apparently scatter the moment the solstice ? and the school year ? is in the rear-view mirror.

It's hardly a new phenomenon.

In many of our communities there is a prevailing school of thought if you're looking to reach the greatest number of people who might be interested in a community event, a municipal survey, or to provide value input on just about anything, it needs to be done before June 21, or before Canada Day at the very latest.

The idea is that most people in our communities go away for the summer, whether to their cottage or other climes. To my mind, this line of thinking is a bit outmoded due to the explosion of young families around here setting down their first roots and less likely to have a bolthole elsewhere to call their own. Additionally, in today's economic climate, there are likely fewer and fewer people who have the means to get away to a lake or another picturesque setting on a regular basis compared to previous generations.

So, as it stands, community events are coming fast and furious, with weekends packed to the proverbial gills. It sometimes feels overwhelming and harder to keep up with each passing year ? but keep up we must as many of these events and observances are very important for both our collective consciousness and our sense of community.

Over the last couple of weeks, we have seen hikes for hospices, gatherings to shine a light on maladies such as Alzheimer's other forms of dementia, and in the days ahead we will have large-scale events that highlight the importance of mental health, particularly for our youth; occasions that will showcase the remarkable talent that resides within so many of our residents; and observances that will shine a light on the history of our Indigenous peoples.

Some of these events foster a sense of community for individuals who might not feel as included as they should be on a day-to-day basis, and so was the weekend that was.

On Saturday and Sunday, I had the opportunity to attend two events that are particular favourites on my calendar each and every year. First up was the Aurora Public Library's annual Drag King Story Hour. Well, speaking in the most technical of terms, it was their inaugural Drag King event after several years of hosting Drag Queens both local and from within the GTHA. Queen or King, they come armed with a veritable library of inclusive children's lit ? chosen to show kids that wherever they might be in their lives, and whatever their life experiences, there is always a place for them in the towns and cities they call home and within families and communities that love them.

The first few iterations of this event within Aurora were particularly well-received, but coming out of the pandemic were the subject of a small trickle of backlash, a small but no less significant pushback that crept in from larger communities.

As such, organizers can't be faulted for bringing in police to keep an eye on the proceedings, and this year was no exception. Nor was this year an exception to the feeling I had of having to be there extra early in order to be on hand for ? and ahead of ? any disturbances.

While this year's turnout was slightly down from years past, I am so glad to say the joy that lit up the Magna Room on Saturday

morning as Gustav settled in with his chosen books was just as high as ever ? and the grand total of protestors who turned out to mar the occasion was a blessed zero.

The following day brought the annual Aurora Street Festival hosted by the local Chamber of Commerce. By all appearances, it was back at full speed after trying to regain the remarkable momentum it enjoyed prior to the Global Pandemic.

Tens of thousands of people filled Yonge Street taking in more than 500 booths of products and services ranging from the conventional to the weird and wonderful, food from just about every part of the world, and music and entertainment to suit just about every taste.

What struck me, however, aside from the sheer volume of people filling the streets, was the number of people I saw waving Pride flags and wearing Progress Pride flags close to their hearts in the form of stickers in the shape of, well, hearts.

It was a sight I don't recall seeing in the more than 10 years I have been covering this event.

It might be foolish to think that these two instances are a sign that a corner has been turned after several post-pandemic years of ramped up hate speech and discrimination against the 2SLGBTQIA+ community writ large, and towards the Trans and Gender-Diverse community in particular, but these signs of solidarity certainly left me feeling more positive at the time of this writing on Monday morning than the slight trepidation I felt Friday night.

One can only hope the myriad activities that are planned to mark Pride Month for the balance of June are received with similar warmth and acceptance.

?Celebrating Pride Month has never been more important than it is right now,? says Pflag York Region president Tristan Coolman. ?Decades ago, our community members, parents, and allies were persecuted, threatened, became social pariahs, assaulted, and even murdered for simply trying to be who they are and defend their loved ones. Pride Month is about honouring this history. Honouring the folks who threw the first bricks at Stonewall, who marched down the streets of Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver; resisting the cultural norms of their time. We honour the parents in New York, Los Angeles, Toronto and many other cities big and small who were the amongst first allies to organize and start organizations like pflag.

?Our queer elders showed up for us in the streets, they defiantly lived openly and faced acts of discrimination many of us can't fathom and their allies were there supporting them along the way. Today, we need our community and especially our allies to show up and reengage once again. Join a workshop, put a sign on your lawn, in your window, and show our community just how much real support there is for transgender and gender-diverse people in our communities. We all owe it to our elders, to their legacy to meet the moment and continue the fight and it is everyone's responsibility to ask themselves how they will respond to this call to action. You must ask yourself, how will future generations judge your actions, today.?