

## Thanks and Gratitude

by BROCK WEIR

I've always felt Thanksgiving to be a particularly special time of year.

Sure, Christmas and Easter are often seen as the big headliners as far as widely-observed holidays and observances go, but they get enough time in the limelight to share a little bit of it.

One thing going in its favour: the meal. There are few meals more satisfying in my book than a Thanksgiving turkey with all the trimmings. When done right, it's a perfect mix of savoury with a few lashings of sweet and, if you're like me and an ardent member of the Pumpkin Pie populous, a fair bit of spice, too.

It's a time of year when the weather is a bit more predictable and any plans you might have are less likely to hinge on the vagaries of the weather we've come to, well, weather in the mid-winter and early spring, and not having to worry about a snow drift getting in the way of making merry certainly is a stress buster!

It's also a comparatively easy-breezy holiday. While there might be some debate about meal prep, it's not a season when you find yourself in a retail battle zone getting that last-minute gift for a last-minute addition to your list. Given the pace of life today, that's not an insignificant thing!

While I'm often one to try hard ? some might say too hard ? to accentuate the positive in situations where there might seem to be precious few positives to be had, I found myself coming up short in the Silver Linings department in the lead-up to this year's holiday.

It had been a difficult summer for our family and while things have calmed down somewhat, at least temporarily, there is still plenty of uncertainty on the horizon. That uncertainty was coupled with a feeling of a bit of burnout creeping in, despite my best efforts to achieve that elusive work-life balance so many of us busy people are striving to find these days, and, as the days went on, I was admittedly feeling a bit down in the dumps.

That, however, turned around significantly on Thursday night as I attended the 10th annual Dancing with the Easter Seals Stars Aurora-Newmarket.

Always a fun and rewarding event on my calendar ? except for last year when, at the last minute, I decided nobody would appreciate sharing in my bronchitis ? it was a particular pleasure to be there not only to celebrate how far the event has come but the sheer ability it has to bring community together; after all, \$1 million raised for Easter Seals in the decade since it was first established is nothing to sneeze at.

For me, it was also a pleasure to be able to celebrate in the achievements of the owners of Aurora's Artistica Ballroom Dance Studios, a once-fledgling business that has gone from strength to strength as they've built their profile in the community alongside their capacity for giving.

The wonderful evening, which culminated in one of the most beautiful dances I've seen on the floor of the event, certainly put the wind back in my sails and, with the internal battery recharged, I was able to truly appreciate and be thankful for all that I have, all the people in my life, and, yes, the privilege I have of being able to look forward to that aforementioned meal ever year.

With a little bit of downtime this weekend, I also took the opportunity to reflect on another milestone.

This week marks the 25th anniversary of our sister paper, The Auroran, an independent newspaper founded by long-time newsman,

community builder, and councillor Ron Wallace.

Begun on a shoestring and initially reliant on volunteers, it had its work cut out for it going toe-to-toe with some larger competitors, but quickly found its foothold in the community.

The Auroran had just celebrated its ninth anniversary when Ron brought me on as the paper's main reporter following the death of stalwart contributor Dick Illingworth, and, in many ways, I was coming into a very different world than the one I find myself in now.

I like to think the paper was founded with a 'small town mentality' in the best sense of the phrase; at its core was the idea that if it mattered to the community, it mattered to us. And, as the paper grew alongside the community it covered, I like to think that hyper-local perspective still holds true.

Following Ron's retirement in 2011, I was honoured to be chosen to take over as editor and, while we have grown and tweaked our format a little bit, I hope we've been able to maintain our focus on the community while also being conscious of how events in the wider world can impact so many here at home.

Going through back copies of the paper ahead of this anniversary year raised many smiles over memories made, while there were moments of reflection looking at content from creators in our earliest days who are no longer with us - Ron Wallace, photographer David Falconer, columnist Jan Freedman, and so many more whose words and moments captured illuminated our community.

It was a pleasure leafing through and revisiting hot-button stories of the day, from political intrigues, to celebrating the achievements of up-and-coming leaders and remembering the achievements of those who came before us who are now part of our historical tapestry; student successes that lead to tremendous steps forward in business, service, and elsewhere; innovations that have taken the world by storm; local sports heroes who have gone out to conquer the world; opening celebrations of local landmarks and institutions that are too numerous to count and, truth be told, the closure or demise of far too many landmarks and institutions that gave generations of this community joy.

We weathered a global pandemic but, amid all the loss and fear that was ubiquitous in that period of time, we saw so, so many examples of the community pulling together to help keep each other safe, make ends meet, or simply to raise a smile or two to brighten the darkness - stories which always felt especially rewarding to me.

Twenty-five years is a long time in any industry and it was heartening to see that as much as things change, there are still so many constants to hold onto - and one key to that constancy is being able to keep a finger on the pulse of the communities we serve: shining a light on truth in a sea of misinformation, training that same light on community builders and people making significant differences, no matter how small they might seem on the surface, documenting the community's joys, and joining in on moments of difficulty and sorrow - and, sadly, there has been no shortage of the latter in recent years.

It's what The Auroran has done for a quarter century, and what community newspapers had done for generations before that new kid on the block stepped into the fray back in 2000, and it's what we all commit to continuing into the future.

And, to have the opportunity to be a part of that, I'm truly grateful.