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Joan Kelley Walker to guide Serve & Savour patrons on culinary journey

By Brock Weir

This year has been a very busy one for Joan Kelley Walker.

The philanthropist, fresh off TV success as one of The Real Housewives of Toronto, inspired Aurora students with her own philanthropic experiences earlier this year at the 2018 Give Back Awards, participated in United Nations events to mark the advancement of women. Just last week, she returned from Dubai to lay the groundwork for her new clothing line, which will benefit international programs empowering women.

Next month, however, the King resident will be back in Aurora for something of a change of pace, leading up to 1,000 ticket holders on a culinary journey for the inaugural To Serve & Savour.

To Serve & Savour on Sept. 7 is on track to become the largest-ever single fundraiser for Wounded Warriors Canada. It brings together celebrity chefs from across Canada to dazzle ticket-holders with a culinary battle, a friendly fight which will raise money for PTSD programs tailored to local first-responders.

Walker, wife of Magna CEO Don Walker, will be at the microphone to make sure nobody misses a single piece of the action.

?As MC, I am going to be talking to the celebrity chefs about their creations and how they have paired it,? she said, noting Gallo Wines has generously provided the wine for the evening. ?I will be going around and talking to everybody about all the details of their food, why they are involved, what the event means to them, and how we go about finding the perfect pairing. I don't know what the menu is yet, but I can't wait to get in there and start trying everything, and I will be right in there with everyone else!?

To Serve and Savour is the brainchild of Jonathan Goodyear, executive chef at the Magna Golf Club. Approached earlier this year by Magna's Steve Hinder and York Regional Police Chief Eric Jolliffe with the idea of doing something to benefit Wounded Warriors Canada, Goodyear took the germ and grew this into something big.

A former contestant on Master Chef Canada himself, Goodyear pulled out all the stops and secured the likes of noted Canadian chefs Cory Vitiello, Jason Bangerter (Langdon Hall), Victor Barry (Piano Piano), and Afrim Pristine, the world's youngest cheese master, to bring their respective A-games to the Magna Hoedown Tent ? before a single piece of straw is brought in to transform it into the familiar Hoedown venue.

?It wasn't really clear what my role would be,? said Walker of when she was first approached to participate in the event. ?We got together and started brainstorming what we could do to help support not just York Regional Police officers, but other frontline workers in York Region and beyond. That's when Wounded Warriors came to the surface, because they are an incredible organization and they are already doing good work. I was asked to emcee the To Serve & Savour event because I do a lot of that type of thing. It was a really huge honour for me to do that.

?The event has food stations, celebrity chefs, live auction and silent auction, so there is a little bit for everyone. I love the fact that they are holding it in the Hoedown Tent before any of the straw arrives. It's a great way to multipurpose that tent and keep the cost down so more of the profit will go to support our frontline workers.?

After signing on, Walker got down to business. Chief Jolliffe introduced her to the York Regional Police's staff psychologist, Kyle Handley, to learn more about what the local police department is doing first-hand to provide assistance to the men and women in their department who might need it. She also researched testimonials made by frontline workers.

?I saw a video of a police officer who has worked to protect children and he explained how difficult it was to keep up this brave, brave front, but how difficult it was personally for a husband, a father, a dad to see the way some children handle what happens in their life,? noted Walker. ?He sort of felt like he didn't want to be that guy who was singled out and the one who was asking for help.

?There needs to be more resources that are acceptable and expected. If they go through a traumatic call, they should have somewhere to turn and they should be able to talk about it with someone. That is really important because just think of what these people go through on a daily basis. (They delve into) the parts of society that the general public doesn't, parts that you don't want to see, that would be so difficult for anyone to deal with. No matter how hardened you are and how much you brace yourself in the job, you're still a person.

?A lot of our officers are parents, they are compassionate, caring people, and what they have to deal with on a daily basis is difficult, and that goes for trauma nurses, EMS people, firefighters. They see a lot of tragedy and we need to support them.?

To Serve & Savour, she said, will be a ?great night out? featuring a police band called Unknown Trouble, as well as the vocal stylings of George St. Kitts, Leah Daniels, some previous winners of the Hoedown Showdown, and some musical surprises as well.

?This is our first year, but it will be really innovative, interesting, and I think it is the start of something big,? Walker said.
For more information on To Serve and Savour, including tickets, visitwww.yrp.ca/en/community/To-Serve-and-Savour.asp.