

Mayor's Local Legends Gala raises \$75K for King Heritage & Cultural Centre and Arts Society King

By Jim Stewart

The King Township 'Local Legends' event, enjoyed by hundreds of attendees at The Manor on Thursday night, was a rousing success. Donors and sponsors raised \$75,000 for the King Heritage & Cultural Centre and Arts Society King (ASK). In addition to being a formidable fundraiser, the Mayor's Biennial Cultural Gala was a meta-event. It was comprised of a Keynote Address during which Mayor Pellegrini praised the attendees' support of cultural institutions in King; a spirited open auction that raised funds for Arts Society King and the King Heritage and Cultural Centre; a 'reveal' of the four inaugural inductees being enshrined in the King Township Sports Hall of Fame; and a plated dinner and dance party enjoyed by guests in the elegant environs of Carrying Place's Event Centre. Michele McNally performed the dual role of emcee and auctioneer with grace, charm, energy, and efficacy. The musical stylings of Elliott Berenthin soothed the early arrivals and buffet grazers, while 'Sensations Live Music', a seven-person ensemble from Vaughan, provided the drumrolls for each of the KTSHOF inductees, musical backdrop for the auction, and the engaging entertainment for the dance party. McNally, president of Arts Society King since 2020, introduced Mayor Pellegrini who welcomed guests and applauded the dignitaries in attendance including King-Vaughan MPP and Minister of Energy and Mines Stephen Lecce, as well as all six King Township Councillors: Jordan Cescolini (Ward 1), David Boyd (Ward 2), Jennifer Anstey (Ward 3), Mary Asselstine (Ward 4), Debbie Schaefer (Ward 5), and Avia Eek (Ward 6). Aurora Mayor Tom Mrakas showed his support for the gala fundraiser by his presence as well. Mayor Pellegrini made sure that he thanked his lovely wife Barbara and cited the Township's long-standing support of the arts in King as well as the brand new Sports Hall of Fame: "This is our fourth night to support ASK and the King Heritage Cultural Centre. Their efforts are integral in preserving our rich local history. I also invite you to visit the new King Township Sports Hall of Fame at the Zancor Centre. All proceeds from tonight's gala will support local arts-based and heritage projects. We saw the importance of these projects when we restored the King Christian Church and the oldest Railway Station in Ontario last year. I hope you enjoy the delicious dinner and the great dancing tonight. Let's continue to make life better in King and ensure that our rich cultural history is enjoyed by generations to come." The mayor's keynote was followed by a much-anticipated announcement by the King Township Sports Hall of Fame. Emcee McNally called KTSHOF Selection Committee Chair David Boyd to the stage to reveal the inaugural class of builders, coaches, and athletes. Councillor Boyd extended the suspense by praising the Class of 2026: "Each of these incredible athletes' stories remind us that greatness is not an accident, but a culmination of passion, tireless work, and relentless dedication in pursuit of your goals and dreams. Tonight, we honor their extraordinary efforts and commitment to sport and the King community. Know that these community builders continue to inspire our athletes of tomorrow and prove what is possible with hard work and perseverance." The KYSHOF Selection Chair requested drumrolls from Sensations Live Music and, one by one, the inductees were revealed to the assembly. In the Builder Category: James 'Jim' Elder. In the Coaching Category: Mike Kitchen. In the Athlete Category: Rosannagh 'Rosie' MacLennan and the posthumous enshrinement of Suzanne Morrow Francis. Councillor Boyd praised Elder as "one of Canada's most celebrated and accomplished equestrians. Over his international career, he competed in six Olympic Games between 1956 and 1984, earning a bronze medal at the 1956 Melbourne Summer Olympics and a gold medal at the 1968 Mexico Summer Olympics. His success extended beyond the Olympic stage, with multiple Pan-American Games medals and a World Championship title in 1970. For 50 years, Jim and his late wife Marianne operated Elderberry Hill Farm in nearby Aurora, helping to inspire young athletes and shape the region's reputation as a world-class equestrian hub. His legacy is celebrated across Canada through numerous honours, including induction into Canada's Sports Hall of Fame, the Canadian Olympic Hall of Fame, and Canada's Walk of Fame, as well as his appointment as an Officer of the Order of Canada." After another drumroll for effect, Councillor Boyd extolled Mike Kitchen's considerable achievements as both an NHL coach and player: "Growing up in Schomberg, Mike played with the Schomberg Red Wings where he was part of several championship teams before winning the Memorial Cup in 1975 with the Toronto Marlboros. During his NHL playing career with the Colorado Rockies and New Jersey Devils, Mike was known as a disciplined defensive defenceman who competed with consistency and toughness. Following his retirement in 1985, Mike would establish a successful coaching career that included roles with the Toronto Maple Leafs, St. Louis Blues, Florida Panthers, and Chicago Blackhawks where he helped the Hawks win the 2013 and 2015 Stanley Cups. Mike was known for his strong defensive strategies, hard work ethic, and his ability to

mentor younger players. With over 2,400 NHL games as a coach, Mike's legacy is minted as one of the league's most experienced bench leaders. His success in bringing home the Stanley Cup to the community has also helped inspire the next wave of young local athletes. Councillor Boyd didn't miss a beat as the next drumroll introduced a list of accomplishments by Rosie MacLennan: One of Canada's most accomplished Olympians as a two-time trampoline champion. Growing up in King City, and training at Skyriders Trampoline Place in nearby Richmond Hill, Rosie was the first trampolinist in history to win back-to-back Olympic gold medals at the 2012 London and 2016 Rio Summer Games. She represented Team Canada as a flag-bearer in 2016. Not only is she a four-time Olympian, but she also earned multiple World Championship titles and Pan-American Games gold medals making her one of Canada's most successful gymnasts. Following her retirement in 2022, Rosie has continued to be a passionate advocate for removing financial barriers to sport for children and youth across Canada. She remains committed to advocacy, mentorship, and advancing safe, inclusive, and equitable sport across Canada. Rosie embodies the confidence, resilience, and leadership that defined her athletic career, and her legacy has forged the path for the next generation of Canadian trampolinists and athletes. The inaugural induction ceremony was completed with the posthumous enshrinement of world-class figure skater Suzanne "Suzi" Morrow Francis who passed away on June 11, 2006. Councillor Boyd described Morrow's technical skill and artistry and her illustrious career: At the 1948 Winter Olympics in St. Moritz, she and her pairs partner Wallace Diestelmeyer won a bronze medal. They would go on to make history by performing the first one-handed death spiral in Olympic competition. Following her retirement from competition, Suzi became a prominent judge and official and the first woman to take the Olympic Judge's Oath at the 1988 Calgary Winter Games. In 1992, Suzi was inducted into the Skate Canada Hall of Fame. We are honored to recognize her legacy here in King, celebrating not only an exceptional athlete but someone who embodies the true spirit of the community. We are pleased to have Suzi's long-time best friend, Patricia Soanes, here this evening. Patricia Soanes stood, acknowledged the assembly, and Councillor Boyd thanked her for joining us to honor Suzi's legacy in King. The meta-event shifted from a celebration of builders, coaches, and athletes to the gustatory delights served by the hospitable staff. The plated dinner service in Alexander Hall was a Winter feast for guests at The Manor. Its first course was Casarecce in a Tomato Basil Sauce followed by a decadent main entrée: a 4-ounce veal tenderloin, a port wine reduction 4-ounce grilled Atlantic Salmon Filet, champagne beurre blanc with "My Mothers" potatoes aka Lemon Greek Potatoes, Red Pepper slivers, and asparagus as well as an assortment of fresh baked focaccia and a bottle of "My Mothers" olive oil per table. The entree was complemented by an assortment of freshly-baked focaccia and a bottle of "My Mothers" olive oil per table. Dessert was a duo of sweet confection minis including Raspberry Swirl with White Chocolate Chunks Cheesecake, and Belgian Chocolate Mousse. After dinner was enjoyed and the auction raised thousands of dollars for two significant Township cultural institutions, Mayor Pellegrini savored the scene during our interview: "I couldn't be prouder of the community to have such a great turnout and such an eclectic mix of guests to support arts and culture in King. We are so blessed to have the Arts Society King and the King Heritage and Cultural Centre as significant contributors to life in the Township. Mayor Pellegrini also expressed his community pride in the newly-formed King Township Sports Hall of Fame and its inaugural class: "We have so many great hockey players and Olympians that have grown up in King. It's a really good tribute to another key part of King's culture and tributes to Rosie, Jim, Mike, and Suzanne will be unveiled a future event at the Zancor Centre. So many of our great athletes are celebrated in paintings in our gym (at the King Township Municipal Centre). Now, I'm looking forward to seeing our athletes' careers on display at the King Township Sports Hall of Fame. The affable civic leader offered his summation of the setting: "This is a dazzling formal event with so many good things happening the food and the atmosphere are great. For Peter and Paul's, this is a premier event here at The Manor. All the support given to ASK and the Cultural Centre where we restored the King Christian Church and the King Railway Station in 2025 is appreciated. We really punch above our weight for a Township of 30,000 people."