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Sheppard?s Bush goes high tech for 2015 Haunted Forest



By Brock Weir

If you're looking for a few thrills and chills at this weekend's Haunted Forest, prepare for things to be turned up to a family-friendly eleven thanks to a technological boost from a local filmmaker.

Sheppard's Bush will be transformed this Saturday, October 24, into the Town of Aurora's annual fright fest, the Haunted Forest, welcoming young ghouls, goblins and their families for a night of pre-Hallowe'en fun.

Volunteers are hard at work this week putting the finishing touches on the event, including 54 area students tasked with gutting and carving hundreds of pumpkins, but for a particularly spooky treat, organizers dove into the digital realm.

?We have been really fortunate to work with a local volunteer, Jared Pelletier, who lives in Aurora, grew up in Aurora and has actually now become a really famous film producer,? said Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora, of the native Auroran who is carving a name for himself in sci-fi fare in Hollywood. ?He has been very generous to provide us with an enhancement of digital 3D imaging, which I am hoping will be really appreciated at the event. We are going to be testing this new technology and I am really hoping it will continue to provide the ?wow' factor with this event.?

Reluctant to share too much about what is in store as far as this new collaboration is concerned to preserve that ?wow' factor, Ms. Ware did confide the digital component is married with a live component.

Also new this year is ?Casper's Scare School?, which sees a school bus transformed into a veritable theatre for the telling of ghost stories, now being honed by a number of local youth who have been appointed ?official ghost story tellers.?

?At our debriefing last year, I came up with Casper's Scare School because we often had bad weather and the ghost stories had always been negatively impacted by that,? says Ms. Ware. ?But, I can honestly say whatever the weather is on Saturday it adds to the event. If it is a calm, clear night, that adds to it. If there is a slight bit of fog or precipitation, it adds to it. The weather only impacts us and the volunteers negatively.?

In the days ahead, there will be little rest for the organizers and volunteers. The youth are on pumpkin detail with 300 gourds ready to be transformed, while others are tasked with the logistics.

?In the first three or four years, we recruited really hard in the community [for volunteers] and in the schools,? says Ms. Ware. ?Since that time, the event has had a really strong reputation and the volunteers and youth actually come to us in droves. We do

some advertising through our mobile signs, but as soon as Ribfest happens I start getting calls from youth asking if the forms are ready to be filled out, which is nice because it is an enjoyable opportunity for them as well as a much needed service for us.

?At our Colours of Fall concert this year, two twin volunteers we have been working with all summer saw our supplies [for Haunted Forest] there and came up with an idea for a display. This continual snowball effect of idea upon idea upon idea [keeps things fresh]. We are relying more so on community groups such as the Fifth Aurora Scouts and the Aurora Seniors' Association, and the Canadian Children' Theatre Company on their involvement as well.?

Wristbands for this year's Haunted Forest are on sale now, and must be purchased in advance from the Aurora Family Leisure Complex (AFLC) or Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex. Parking at the Mary Street entrance to Sheppard's Bush will be limited, and a shuttle bus will be operating throughout the night from the AFLC, which will also host a program of activities.

The Haunted Forest runs from 6 ? 9 p.m.