

INSIDE AURORA: Groundhog Daze 2016

By Scott Johnston

A few days ago, as often happened when I was out walking in the arboretum this time of year, I ran into Aurora Annie, our local weather prognosticating groundhog.

As was frequently the case when I saw her, she looked depressed.

?What's the matter?? I asked, brushing the snow off a convenient bench and sitting down. ?Are you concerned about getting your prediction right this year??

?No, it's not that,? she sighed, hopping up to take a spot beside me. ?I just don't know if people appreciate me anymore.?

?Of course, we do,? I reassured her. ?Canadians love talking about the weather, and there aren't many towns with someone of your talents. What are you at, a 72 per cent accuracy rate??

?Actually, it's 78 per cent,? she said with a shy smile. Then, throwing her tiny arms wide she continued, ?but it's not my meteorological skills, it's that no one really cares what I have to say.?

Looking off into the distance, she sighed again.

?I remember when people would flock to Aurora to hear my predictions. There would be newspeople, and well-wishers by the dozen. I'd stand up on that stump over there, the crowd would hush with anticipation, and I'd make my prediction. Then they'd cheer and laugh and smile. It didn't even matter whether it was expected to be a long or short winter. It was a real party atmosphere.?

?Now, no one really knows I exist, and The Auroran's about the only annual media coverage I get. As for folks from outside of Town, even if they did show up, there's no hotel space to accommodate them, anyway.?

?Maybe that's your problem,? I said. ?You need to adapt to the times.?

She sniffed as she looked over.

I think she'd been crying a bit.

?It's been tradition for you to stand out here and make your announcements. That's what Groundhog Day is all about. But, apart from maybe the Arctic Adventure, people don't want to spend hours standing around outside in the cold in February. They'd rather all be inside on their smart phones and tablets.?

?So why don't you take to the internet, or Twitter, or Facebook? I bet if you got plugged into social media, you'd get millions of followers from all over the world.?

?You really think so?? she asked, looking up at me with red-rimmed eyes.

?Sure. And instead of seeing you once a year, you'd be able to connect instantly with people every day. With that sort of profile, you'd have tons of momentum going into February each year.?

?I would, wouldn't I??

Thinking it over and looking around, she said, ?It really can be quite bitter out here in early February. I could do all that from inside my burrow, and not even step outside!?

?That's the spirit,? I enthused. ?And all you need are some basic communication devices and a good wifi connection. Any good electronics place could set you up with everything you need in no time.?

?Yes!? she exclaimed, sitting up quickly. ?I'm going to look into that right now.?

With that, she hopped off the bench and hurried off with a spring in her step.

As I watched her disappear around a corner, I mentally wished her well. Groundhog Day doesn't attract the attention it once did, and I'd hate to see Aurora lose Annie's predictions and another of its traditions.

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