

Celebrate your roots at Aurora's re-booted multicultural festival

By Brock Weir

Aurora's cultural diversity will be proudly displayed next Saturday, September 10, as the Town of Aurora hosts its re-booted Multicultural Festival.

Based largely on a multicultural festival held in 2013 in conjunction with the Town's Sesquicentennial Celebrations, this day of music, dancing and food, henna body art, children's activities and more, all celebrating Chinese, Greek, Korean, Portuguese, Russian and South Asian Cultures, will once again return to Ada Johnson Park and there is only room to grow.

The new Multicultural Festival is the brainchild of Councillor Harold Kim, whose Notice of Motion to lay the groundwork for a new festival was approved by Council last year. As the Festival takes shape with just days to go, he says he is excited to see what is in store for Aurora residents.

"I am a relatively new Auroran," says Councillor Kim on the inspiration behind the Festival. "My family moved here in the summer of 2010 and we moved here because when you walk or drive through Aurora there is something distinct about the Town compared to its neighbouring communities: a sense of community and a sense of volunteerism. After a few years of living here, I started to take more pride in my neighbourhood and my community."

After becoming more immersed in what the community had to offer, Councillor Kim says he became "hooked, line and sinker."

"From my days living in the other parts of the 905, people don't have the same community spirit in Aurora and even the new residents are coming from places like Richmond Hill and Markham where, and I say this with respect, community spirit is not as prevalent," he contends. "Many of the new residents are from east and south Asian descent and eastern Europe. When you look at the last census, Aurora is predominantly of a Western European or Caucasian persuasion and with the influx of new Aurorans I was concerned that the community and spirit of volunteerism might get diluted and it was important that newer residents understand the culture of Aurora and what makes it so special."

"Myself being a newer resident going through the experience myself, I felt like it was important for newer residents to become engaged and I thought the perfect venue for newer residents and older residents to meet, share culture and befriend one another is through the multicultural festival environment."

This free way to connect gets underway September 10 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Ada Johnson Park, which is located on Hartwell Way at Conover Avenue, just east of Bayview Avenue.

For Councillor Kim, this location on the east side of Town was an important one as that is where so many newcomers to Aurora have been settling in recent years as the community develops.

"My original thought was it should be in the newer part of Town for its inaugural event," he says. "My vision is for the Festival to rotate through Aurora. Frankly, a lot of neighbours in the newer part of Town haven't been west of Yonge and vice versa. I thought it was really important for residents to move around Aurora and experience different parts of the Town. It is important for the first event to be held in the newer parts of Aurora. If you hold it at Town Park, it might very well be the same people [coming out] and not the newer residents. I felt it was really important to bring the activity to the newer residents at least for the first year."

"This is an important opportunity to explore Aurora but you don't have to go very far to do so. There were some comments made that you're missing out on other ethnic or cultural groups like Italian, Czech and others, but there are over 190 countries in the world and every year we're going to try and share all those other countries ? and it is going to take time to get through all 190 ? but there is no reason why those six or seven are first. We're going to try and get every culture in there as years progress!?"

For more information on Aurora's Multicultural Festival, visit www.aurora.ca.