

Everything old is new again at inaugural Windfall Harvest Festival



By Brock Weir

If you think sustainability is a new concept, think again.

For previous generations, nothing went to waste. Energy was only used when needed, animals were used from tip to tail, and time was spent in the great outdoors.

But, everything comes full circle, sustainability is once again the name of the game, and Windfall Ecology Centre will be marrying the past, present and future this month with their inaugural Windfall Harvest Festival.

Celebrating Diversity: Food, Land & People will take place Sunday, September 24 from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Windfall's historic headquarters in Sheppard's Bush. A re-launch of the Windfall Ecology Centre which was once York Region's largest free community festival showcasing the natural environment, Celebrate Diversity is made possible through a grant from the Ontario 150 Community Celebration Program.

With this grant money, Windfall has set about to put a completely new spin on their festival, aiming to bring the community together and raise awareness of Ontario's rich cultural, ecological and historical narrative.

"For 14 years, we ran an ecology festival in Newmarket and we were looking for something to do in the fall, something that was play-based, right next to our homes, and what better place than right here in Sheppard's Bush?" says Windfall's Executive Director Brent Kopperson. "It is really important to be grounded and have an understanding of where we're coming from. It helps situate us and makes it easier to explore the future when you know where you've come from.

"Here, we're on a sustainability journey and sustainability will be a key theme throughout our event. Many of the old practices are being renewed again and we will be demonstrating some of those things."

To do so, they are going right back to the roots, incorporating demonstrations from the First Nations that called this area home, as well demonstrations featuring re-enactors interpreting the practices of later pioneers, going right through to current and future green energy projects.

"We have been working with First Nations communities for many, many years both locally and in the near and far north," says Mr. Kopperson. "We have had to look around a little bit for the pioneer components, with some waving demonstrations and other things that are going to be happening. Then we are mixing the old with the new because on the same day we are part of the Canada-wide Doors Open exhibition where we will be touting our contributions to the green energy field."

Working in conjunction with the Healthy Kids Community Challenge, the Celebrating Diversity festival will offer something for the whole family, whether it is the First Nations or Pioneer demonstrations or opportunities to get your hands dirty with Nature Play. Weaving all this together has fallen to Windfall's Jen Atkinson and Kathleen Ko, who have both been working diligently to plan the demonstrations, and play activities, but also to secure local food producers and celebrity food talent to really showcase this area's bounty.

"We wanted to make a theme for the festival and focus on the people, land and food," says Ms. Ko. "It is also co-sponsored by the Healthy Kids Community Challenge so, by collaborating with that program we wanted to bring physical activity and healthy eating

and celebrating the diversity of local foods and veggies and fruit for the kids and families as well. It is bringing all those activities together for a new focus.

?The whole process has been really interesting because the festival is on site here, which we have never done before, thinking about what would be a good fit for the space and what would really celebrate our theme in a smaller space where it is a smaller scale than the old ecology festival. We will have access to the log cabins and we're also going to try and utilize the trails. We may have some walking tours through the trails and have some of our kids activities extend out onto the trails as well.

?There will be things for kids, for people who are interested in our ecology festival will still find things that are of interest here. The older generations may be interested in the food and the historical component, so it is really a broad range and we're encouraging families to come out with everyone. I think a lot of it is appreciating what is available locally, giving appreciation to the food producers and the organizations who work on the conservation as well, and appreciating what we have and hopefully learning something about the history and culture people haven't been exposed to before.?

For more in the Windfall Harvest Festival, visit windfallcentre.ca/festival.