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Sportscaster joins forces with Museum to share story of Canada?s Birthday Town

Canada Day is usually one spent on the road for sportscaster James Duthie.

A resident of Aurora for more than a decade, the TSN anchor is often in studio as Canada's birthday falls on the NHL's first day of free agency and is rarely able to return home in time other than to pick up his kids from Canada Day fireworks at Lambert Willson Park.

But, as Canada Day approached this year, Mr. Duthie was looking forward to a new kind of holiday.

There was a chance to make new memories at home with his family ? including a new French bulldog puppy ? as well as a chance to use his talents to share how his adopted hometown became known as ?Canada's Birthday Town.?

To coincide with Canada Day, the Aurora Museum & Archives launched a new website to help Aurorans celebrate the special day in a new way. Expanding on an online exhibition and short film from 2017 which charted how Aurora earned the patriotic title, the museum took their raw materials and brought on Mountain Goat Film Company to re-interpret the exhibition in a fresh way ? in a story told by a new voice.

The next step was enlisting a voice that was both fresh and familiar ? and local.

?When I was asked to narrate this film, I couldn't pass up the chance to not only learn the history of how Aurora became Canada's Birthday Town, but also bring the story to life,? said Duthie. ?I was surprised to learn how Aurora was ahead of its time celebrating Canada Day on July 1 and after seeing the film I can honestly say that this community has earned the title.?

Good timing also played a part in the collaboration, he added with a chuckle: ?With the pandemic and the fact I am a sportscaster with no sports!?

?I am not from Aurora in the sense that I moved around the country a lot and just moved here 10 years ago, but it has really become my home,? he told The Auroran. ?It is where I have raised my kids, so there is definitely a real sense of home here and putting down roots, so anything I can do to get involved with my community, I'm there.?

This is indeed the case. For the last several years, with a few exceptions due to prior work commitments, Mr. Duthie has served as the emcee for the annual induction ceremony for the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame, an event that was put on ice for 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is through his work with the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame that the Aurora Museum & Archives connected with the host.

?This opportunity sounded really neat,? he explained. ?Selfishly, I suppose it is cool to have your voice on something that is in the archives of what I now consider my hometown. I had heard this ?Canada's Birthday Town' thing before, in passing a few times over my ten years, but, frankly, I never knew what anybody was talking about! But, as a journalist, we get into this business because of our curiosity to learn things and I just found it was a really interesting story that a bunch of residents on Richardson Drive just came up with the idea of having a party. From there, I guess you can trace all the Canada Day festivities across the country, which I think is a pretty cool story.?

As Mr. Duthie looked forward to spending his first full Canada Day at home with his family in many years, he said he hoped residents who take the time to visit canadasbirthdaytown.ca to watch the documentary take new stock in the place they call home.

?I hope for the people of Aurora it is a source of pride and also nostalgia,? he said. ?For a lot of long-time residents, I hope it does conjure up a lot of memories and I am also hopeful that people outside Aurora get to see the story and recognize [where it started].

?Canada Day has always been one of my favourites. I used to live in Ottawa and it was my favourite day of the year when in my teens and twenties because we would go down to Parliament Hill and it was just such a massive party. To think that the origins of Canada Day festivities started on a street in Aurora I think is pretty cool. I am really hopeful that people across the country somehow get to see the video and realize it all started here.?

By Brock Weir