

Free admission, rock bands will remain at Ribfest this year following grant

By Brock Weir

For many Aurorans, and visitors to the Town, the annual Ribfest is a highlight of the waning days of summer, highlighted by music, food, and free admission.

After months of doubt, however, Aurora confirmed last week that this all-important free admission would once again be the order of the day this year.

Last December, Council approved something very different. They directed staff to set an upset limit of a \$10 admission charge per person, through wristbands, on Friday and Saturday evenings, to take in headliner performances.

It was a contentious decision at the Council table at the time, but a grant from Central Counties Tourism in the amount of \$20,000 made the worry all for naught.

‘Staff have now received appropriate funding to offset the 2014 event enhancements [and] there is no longer a need to implement the selling of wristbands at the 2014 Aurora Ribfest,’ said Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation, in a report to Councillors last week. ‘The 2014 Aurora's Ribfest will continue to be offered to the community, for 31 hours, over a three-day weekend in September. However, as in 2013, event attendees within the event area after 8 p.m. on both Friday and Saturday will still need to be the age of majority.’

Why? Based on last year's souped up event to mark Aurora's Sesquicentennial Celebrations, rock bands will once again punctuate the evening's entertainment. Although those names are still under wraps, all could be revealed as early as next week.

‘Two classic rock headliner bands have been secured, one for each of Friday and Saturday evenings, but unfortunately, due to contract disclosure commitments, the names of the bands cannot be announced until after Wednesday, July 2, 2014. The headliner bands will perform at 9 p.m. on each evening.’

For many members around the Council table who spoke out about having an admission fee for the first time this year, word of the \$20,000 grant was welcome news.

‘I am very glad to see that we were successful in the pursuit of that grant, and we can do it for free this year,’ said Councillor Michael Thompson. ‘I know myself and Councillor Humfries were a little hesitant about charging for it and were anxious to hear the news, so this is great.’

Mayor Geoffrey Dawe expressed a similar sentiment: ‘There will be two smokin' hot bands, but we can't tell anybody yet!’

During last year's discussions over charging an admission fee, some Councillors such as Evelyn Buck and Wendy Gaertner said they were not opposed to making Ribfest a money maker for the Town, in addition to the number of people it brings into the community from elsewhere. This was a position reiterated by Councillor Buck last week.

‘People are putting a substantial amount of money into their pocket through Ribfest and I have never understood why it should cost us money so other people could make money,’ she said. ‘Now, we have a report telling us we have \$20,000, we can hire a couple of great bands and for entertainment. It's a damn good deal for people eating ribs up.’

Last year's Ribfest headliners included Honeymoon Suite.