

Animals will no longer feature in Street Fest following public outcry



By Brock Weir

Animal displays will no longer be a part of the annual Aurora Street Festival following a widespread public outcry over a petting zoo following this past Sunday's event.

On Sunday afternoon, social media lit up with several residents expressing concern and outrage over the conditions endured by animals, and one kangaroo in particular, in a petting zoo maintained by Tiger Paw Exotics.

Pictures posted online show the kangaroo lying on the pavement in a metal enclosure with no shade, no evidence of any water in the pen, with several online commenters posting about animal 'welfare' and even 'cruelty'.

While calls to Tiger Paw Exotics were not picked up by press time, the complaints and concerns spurred action among members of the public, the Aurora Chamber of Commerce, and the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, (OSPCA) as well as Law Insurance Brokers, the private Yonge Street-based company that hired Tiger Paw Exotics to entertain the crowds in their parking lot.

'We definitely appreciated all the citizens sharing their concerns around the display,' said Sandra Watson of the Aurora Chamber of Commerce. 'We certainly don't condone animal cruelty in any sense. The Aurora Chamber of Commerce did not hire Tiger Paw Exotics as an official entertainer of the Street Festival. It was a private company held on a private property.'

Ms. Watson added on Monday that she had further conversations with Law Insurance, confirming the petting zoo will no longer be back at the popular event.

This was also confirmed by Law Insurance on Monday afternoon in an open letter to all those who attended the festival. In the letter, company president Brian McCartney said they were taking the concerns seriously.

'Law Insurance Brokers Limited has put this event on for many years and has always received positive feedback,' said Mr. McCartney. 'Thousands of people took part in the pony rides and petting zoo our company offered on Sunday and we were advised of only a few concerns, which when brought to the attention of Tiger Paw Exotics took action to address.'

'Our staff were onsite during the day and witnessed all the animals (including the kangaroo) interacting with the kids and adults that came to take part. All the animals had food and water throughout the day and I witnessed many of them resting only to get up and interact with the public shortly thereafter. We do not monitor the animals 100 per cent and therefore appreciate the public advising us of issues we may not be aware of.'

?The OSPCA did attend the event, talked to the owner of Tiger Paw Exotics and left. I am unaware of the outcome at this time and will be looking into this report. We have used Tiger Paw Exotics for several years as they advised us they are monitored by government agencies that oversee the protection and control of animals. Due to the concerns of Aurora citizens we will not be having a petting zoo or pony rides in the future.?

As social media went into a frenzy over the kangaroo photos, the situation was being monitored closely by Aurora resident Michelle Nadon of CP4 Animal Rescue, who said she shared the same concerns, questioning the place of a petting zoo at events like these in this day and age.

?Why are animals in these situations in the first place?? she wondered. ?Is it educational? The jury is really out on that topic. What are kids learning staring at an animal laying on the ground on a piece of concrete on Yonge Street? There were a couple of people who did action this, but the majority of the people didn't. They would take their children away when the child was crying or upset about what was going on, but not everybody saw it as something that needed to be actioned, except for these people who thank God they did.

?I would really like to commend the citizens who actioned this and extend my sincere thanks to them on behalf of that kangaroo for caring and doing something.?