

Celebrate 400 years of the French in Ontario with music, art ? and poutine

By Brock Weir

A celebration of French Canadian culture wouldn't quite be complete without a full appreciation of poutine, but that just serves as an appetizer for a full day of activities slated for Aurora next Wednesday as the Town marks Fete du la St-Jean.

The Aurora Cultural Centre has partnered with l'Association des francophones de la region de York (l'AFRY) with a St. Jean Baptiste Day bash on June 24, bringing the tradition of the annual Quebecois early summer party close to home.

Featuring a day of music, arts, and varieties of poutine, the event celebrates not only the Festival but also the 400th anniversary of a French presence in what is now Ontario.

“Most folks in Quebec know St-Jean Baptiste Day as the Fete national du Quebec ? a statutory each June 24?to celebrate identity, culture and achievements of the people of Quebec,” says Jane Taylor of the Aurora Cultural Centre. “The celebrations today often focus on music, arts and food, and to this end the public is invited to enjoy a free after school collection of art activities appropriate for the whole family.”

The festivities culminate with a ticketed concert featuring Nicolas Pellerin & les Grands Hurleurs, a lively evening of traditional, folk and contemporary French music ? all while a poutine cart stations itself outside the Church Street landmark to serve the traditional favourite, which will be allowed into the concert space.

“It was a great meeting of the minds,” says Ms. Taylor of the partnership with l'AFRY. “It is reaching out not just to the Francophones in the community, but also those who just love Francophone culture. After we saw the great response to the Vend du Nord last year we realised there is a real appetite and enthusiasm for Francophone celebrations in Town.

“There is also a sizable francophone population in York Region that are hungry for events that celebrate their cultural celebrations. What I saw here is they are very happy this is happening in their own community and it made sense to go this next step.”

York Region's Francophone community also received a boost this week from the Federal Government with a \$50,000 infusion of funding over two years to l'AFRY.

“Many organizations play a key role in the growth and development of Ontario's Francophone communities,” said Newmarket-Aurora MP Lois Brown in a statement. “By supporting the Association, we are helping our local official-language minority community to prosper and participate fully in Canadian society.”

Tickets for next Wednesday's concert are \$20 in advance or \$25 at the door, and can be purchased online at www.afry.ca. For more information, contact the Aurora Cultural Centre at 905-713-1818.