

Indigenous History Month programs kick off Saturday at Town Park

June is National Indigenous Peoples Month and to celebrate this, and National Indigenous Peoples Day 2022 on June 21, a series of gatherings will take place in Aurora beginning this Saturday at Town Park.

From 10 a.m. to 12 noon, in conjunction with the Aurora Farmers' Market, the Town will host a craft table focused on the Three Sisters story and a hands-on opportunity to make a corn husk doll. Back at Town Park the following Saturday, from 11 a.m. to 12.30 p.m., Traditional Anishinaabe Grandmother Kim Wheatley will lead a Storytelling and Drumming gathering including the chance to make your own drums with recycled material.

In between, on Tuesday, June 21, an art piece by Ojibwe artist Donald Chretien will be installed in Town Park where it will remain in place well into the late fall, according to Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora.

The York Region Arts Council has commissioned nine eight-foot-tall art pieces for all nine York Region municipalities, says Ms. Ware. It's a new program for them and we will have it until at least the late fall. We will be unveiling that first piece on National Indigenous Peoples Day. Kim Wheatley will be on site for the unveiling.

Public art is very important to the Town and being able to connect art with learning about the Indigenous culture and people, while tying it in with National Indigenous Peoples' Day, everything just aligned so perfect it felt like it was meant to be and this art piece is one that when you stand in front of it and take a selfie, the way it is designed you actually become part of it. You become one with it.

In addition to these events, a number of virtual components of Indigenous History Month programs will be online for the remainder of the month through the Town's Indigenous portal at aurora.ca/en/recreation-arts-and-culture/indigenous-history-month.aspx.

These include virtual cooking demonstrations on Indigenous wild rice and strawberry Bannock led by Destiny Rae.

We still want to offer this in a hybrid component, including the food demonstrations, says Ms. Ware. Six months ago, we wouldn't have known what the food offerings are, but now celebrating the Strawberry Moon, it is quite timely that there is a food demo on strawberry Bannock. The elements might be predictable in the sense that we want to offer storytelling because that is such a critical piece of Indigenous history, we want to include drumming, which is another really important component, as well as food, but we receive guidance from our Anishinaabe consultant as well as the community, so we also want to be respectful in how we go about programming and also to ensure we're doing it as best we can.

They are such unique experiences. We also recognize and know up front that we have a lot of learning to do and the first step in learning is listening. With Kim's approach, she also provides hands-on experience which helps us to further learn the stories and the histories. Anyone who has been to a gathering where she has led it will always come back again because she just has such an inclusive way of reaching out to the community. Those who have experienced her definitely become a fan of hers. Those who haven't, take a chance, come out, and just out of curiosity find out what it is that we're trying to share and make available for others to learn about.

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter