

Leaves begin to bud on Canada 150 legacy

By Brock Weir

Thanksgiving has come and gone and, with the change in the weather towards autumn, leaves are quickly fluttering to the ground ? but they're just coming into bud on a legacy project to mark the 150th anniversary of Canadian Confederation.

Over the course of Culture Day on September 30, scores of Aurorans converged on the Aurora Cultural Centre to help paint a flurry of maple leaves and these leaves will soon come together to provide a wide-ranging picture of Aurora's view on Canada.

Council is set to approve this week a grant of \$2,700 to bring dozens and dozens of these painted maple leaves together into a permanent outdoor art installation for the south lawn of the Centre.

The Canada 150 Milestone Mural has been a summer project spearheaded by the Aurora Cultural Centre and Ted Hamer, their Community Art Facilitator.

Its purpose is to commemorate the Canada 150 Milestone through art covering four key themes: Diversity and Inclusion, Truth and Reconciliation, Nature and the Environment, and Who We Are Today & Dreams of a Bright Future.

From June to September, the Centre held community consultations on different themes ? national and local ? that could be represented through the mural and, in addition to those consultations, took the show on the road, providing a presence to gather input and further participation at a variety of community events during those months.

Now, we're getting a picture of things to come.

?We applied for a grant for the Canada 150 Milestone Murals and received a notification for funding late in the spring of this year,? said Suzanne Haines, Executive Director of the Aurora Cultural Centre. ?We then engaged Ted Hamer. Ted comes with a lot of experience: he is a professional artist and professional muralist, and he started a conversation with us on what this mural project might look like.

?Initially, the project was four murals, but we decided to bring it down into one art installation within which we could engage the community. We had over 900 participate with us in the input process to help us determine what is going to be in the mural on the installation. [Themes that came out] were Aurora's trails and Arboretum, the trumpeter swans, horse breeders and imagery from campers. The process moved onto painting and we took those themes to determine what those images would look like in the course of installing and revealing to the community.?

Members of the public got a sneak peek at some of these depictions at Culture Days with just a handful of completed leaves on display bearing such images as local landmarks and local notables, including late Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson. The rest are still in the works but the community had the chance to do its part, taking brushes to the backs of each leaf filling in the blank spaces with the natural colours of leaves in the spring, summer and autumn.

?What I love about this project was how engaging it was for the community,? said Ms. Haines, noting the completed project will affix each individual leaves onto the branches forming the heart of the installation, and reiterating their support for money to provide for installation. ?Our grant included the ability to hire a community arts facilitator to design and fabricate [the mural, but] there wasn't anything in there in terms of installation. When I arrived at the Centre [this past spring] I was quite concerned with attaching anything to the heritage building, so we decided to shift it to an art installation that was off the building. We have also spoken to the Ontario Heritage Trust and they have given us an approval for the installation off of the building.?

Council members too supported the extra infusion of cash at the Committee level this week as well as the placement well away from the walls of the historic Church Street School itself. Their support is expected to be reiterated at this week's Council meeting.

?It is going to be great,? said Councillor Wendy Gaertner. ?It makes perfect sense that we wouldn't want to put our mural on our historic building, so I thank the Executive Director for?coming up with another plan.?

Added Councillor Tom Mrakas: ?I think it is a great showcase to show how the community has gotten involved and worked together to develop a lasting legacy for the Town, and what a great place to put it! I am looking forward to actually seeing it there.?