

Music and storytelling will fill Town Park for National Indigenous History Month



National Indigenous History Month will be marked at Town Park on Saturday, June 22, with music and storytelling.

Led by Anishinaabe Grandmother Kim Wheatley, who has been preparing the event alongside Town of Aurora staff, the event will run from 9 a.m. to 12.30 p.m., opening with Dave Mowatt & Trio, followed by traditional storytelling from Wheatley herself.

Additional on-site attractions will include a story walk and activities, all centred on the theme of maize.

‘This year’s theme symbolizes unity and coming together,’ says Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora, on the banner of Circles of Reconciliation. ‘As with all the programming we’ve done that has an Indigenous component to it, bringing people together and trying to unite us has always been one of the key objectives. This year we want to present a vibrant opportunity to explore and celebrate the cultures, traditions and experiences of First Nations, Inuit, and Metis.’

Each year’s event is planned based on experiences and learnings that have been gleaned from year’s past.

Ware says ‘we have so much we need to learn, we have so much growth, and we still have so much ground to cover’ that they come away with lessons each and every year.

‘I can’t underscore enough how extremely appreciative and fortunate we are to work with Anishinaabe Grandmother Kim Wheatley who helps guide us,’ she says. ‘She doesn’t tell us what to do, she forces us to do our work, come to the planning table, and then she guides us from that stage onward. We look at where we’re at, we look at how it felt the day of, qualitative and quantitative feedback. We look at how this year has progressed as well, not only as a community, but as a nation, too. We’re going to be learning for decades. As we learn, we change as individuals as well.’

‘As Kim told me many years ago, when she comes to these settings she personally likes to plant seeds and to plant a seed that can grow within you. That can be in the sense of curiosity, in terms of wanting to learn more. We really want the experience on June 22, hopefully, [one] that you learn new things, you feel a movement within yourself, but you also walk away with a ton more curiosity and motivation to learn more. There is so much that we need to learn, so hopefully you will learn some things that you can incorporate into your daily living and maybe later on that day, or during your breakfast on Sunday, something just resonates with you and it is in your mind and it transforms your actions or how you choose to spend your time thereafter, which is a very personal experience and a very personal journey, too.’

Mowatt and his trio, which will, she says, ‘immerse the audience in the heart and soul of the blues genre,’ will be an integral part of this ‘and his music proved ‘transformative’ at last year’s gathering.

Beyond the music and the storytelling, the story walk is an activity that attendees can do on their own time. Centred on the cultivation of the often yellow, often white, and sometimes multicoloured veggie, Ware hopes people will leave with a greater understanding of how maize has been used both here at home and around the world.

“Take advantage of this amazing learning opportunity that is in your back yard,” says Ware. “You don’t need to travel way out of York Region for this. This is brought to you, so take advantage that it is here in our charming Aurora, that you get to come to the gorgeous Town Park and take in this experience for free, as well as exploring the Farmer’s Market, which is huge in the community. I can’t think of a better combination!”

For more on the event, including schedules for Dave Mowat’s two performances and Anishinaabe Grandmother Kim Wheatley’s two storytelling sessions, visit www.aurora.ca/en/recreation-arts-and-culture/indigenous-history-month.aspx.

By Brock Weir