

Powwow will signal "New Beginnings"

By Brock Weir

A life-changing moment is just around the corner for residents of Aurora, one which organizers hope will foster a new understanding and a new chapter in making amends with Canada's Indigenous communities, just in time for the 150th anniversary of Confederation.

The "New Beginnings" Powwow, set for Saturday, June 3, at Lambert Willson Park will be one of the key community celebrations put on by the Town of Aurora to mark the Canada 150 Celebrations, but in as much as it is hosted by the Town of Aurora at a municipal park, it is very much a celebration and cultural exchange hosted by and organized by our local First Nations.

"First there was a shriek of excitement and a lot of fist pumping," says Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora, of her reaction learning Council had approved the powwow as a hallmark of the Canada 150 festivities. "Then, it was reaching out to our Aboriginal partners, the White Pine Dancers, to share the good news with them and they were very pleased. "Right out of the gate, from the initial talks of this to it becoming a reality, I have always expressed firmly that in order to have an authentic powwow, the creativity and implementation of the various key elements of a powwow rest within the White Pine Dancers' control. This is a celebration of their culture, which is intended to be delivered in the most authentic way possible and right out of the gate that parameter was drawn in the sand, which I think that has given them comfort."

Of course, there are some elements the Town has been involved with, from marketing to infrastructure, but when it comes down to the actual elements of who will be presenting the powwow, emceeding the event, and making the various components a reality, that is entirely within the realm of First Nations organizers.

The June 3 celebrations are set to get underway at Lambert Willson Park, just off Industrial Parkway North, in behind the Aurora Family Leisure Complex, with the Grand Entry at 12 noon. Festivities will run from 1 to 5 p.m., followed by a Feast from 5 to 7 p.m., leading up to further Festivities and a Closing Ceremony from 7 to 9 p.m.

Performers leading the event include Little Creek Singers (Host Drum), Cold Water Ojibway (Co-Host Drum), Mawla Shawana (Arena Director), and Bob Goulais (Master of Ceremonies).

"It is going to be back-to-back-to-back excitement with very little downtime," says Ms. Ware. "The White Pine Dancers and their extended partners have had and are having an extremely busy year. I know they have been really working left, right and centre to put all the pieces together and I am beyond confident that this will be elaborate, authentic, memorable and exciting."

Indeed, authenticity is very much the order of the day when it comes to "New Beginnings."

In addition to the formal Festivities, vendors will also be on hand to form an artisan marketplace with each vendor having specific indigenous connections they are certainly not going to be vendors familiar to regular attendees of Town of Aurora events specializing in everything from beading to pottery.

The same goes for food vendors. That line drawn in the sand extends to food as well, and organizers have been hard at work to make traditional food preparations a reality on the day of the event.

"This event is going to be one of the signature Canada 150 events of the year and, in my opinion, it is one not to miss," says Ms. Ware. "It will be educational and interactive, but it is my sincere hope that it will also be life-changing and we will have achieved the main objectives of educating others to prevent any future misunderstandings of Indigenous cultures and to demonstrate efforts being made to make amends with Indigenous communities. By us being more educated about their culture, it prevents us making assumptions down the road, which leads to misunderstandings."

For more information on the New Beginnings Powwow visit www.aurora.ca/powwow. The White Pine Dancers also welcome all nations to participate in the powwow through performance. If you are interested in participating, contact Rod Nettagog at bluestonecloud@hotmail.com.