

Ribfest set to sizzle for 10th anniversary



By Brock Weir

The scent and the smoke emanating from Machell Park will draw people to Aurora from far and wide this weekend as Aurora hosts its 10th annual Ribfest.

With the grills firing up on Friday, this year's event will include some big names and a couple of changes from years passed.

Headlining this year's festivities are Canadian bands Chilliwack and The Spoons. The multi-platinum Chilliwack hits the stage Friday, September 11 at 9 p.m. The Spoons, the new-wave synthpop group, headlines the following evening at the same time.

"I can't tell you which band I have heard more sentimental stories about because as soon as I hear one about Chilliwack, I hear one about The Spoons," says Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora. "I am still hearing lots of stories about how The Spoons played at certain high schools around here. With Chilliwack, some people are still shocked the actual Chilliwack is coming. Some people weren't aware they were still performing let alone actually going to be here. We do a lot of tributes community-wide, but this is the real deal and it is harder convincing people that it really is."

This year, however, will be the first to institute a wrist band policy. After 8 p.m. on Friday and Saturday, Ribfest is open only to those 18-year-of-age and older who have purchased ? and are wearing ? a valid wristband, which are currently on sale for \$5 each at the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex, the Aurora Family Leisure Complex, and will also be available for purchase on-site.

"We have had a couple of calls [about the wrist band policy] and whenever I do get contacted I take the time to ensure that all questions are answered so the strategy behind it is communicated," says Ms. Ware. "I think when strategic decisions are made it comes down to defendability: can you defend why a strategy went in that way? I am very confident we are able to defend how this event is going. However, I have to say it has been a landslide of positive responses."

There will always be some people disappointed with the change, she adds, but others still who are happy there is a charge to underscore the value of the event and there is some cost recovery going on. One thing that will be difficult to gauge, however is the impact on the attendance. This will be the first year two name bands will headline the event as last year's Platinum Blonde concert was scrapped due to an electrical storm.

"The other thing is we're not forcing people to go after 8 p.m. either," adds Ms. Ware. "You are going if you choose to go. I sincerely hope the \$5 is not a challenge to everyone, but I am also proud we're also offering more than 24 hours of the event is completely free of charge where there isn't a fee, but that \$5 helps us to ensure safe capacity is met and helps us better control capacities [in the park]."

As the final pieces come together for Friday, Ms. Ware says preparations this year have become something of a trip down memory lane for the team.

Keeping an event like this going for a decade is no small undertaking and to ensure it grows year after year is a significant feat altogether.

'A lot of people start off events and you just assume they keep going, but this one has continued to go with positive growth and that is pretty special,' says Ms. Ware, noting she wants to ensure this event continues to have a distinct Aurora 'footprint.' 'When we started 10 years ago, Ribfests were rarer than they are now.

'Over the last three years, inclusive of this one, the choice of entertainment has gone in a very different direction with the headliner bands coming from the classic rock eras. I like that we have sort of kept a unique flair to an event which is now considered to be common.'