

September celebration focuses on multicultural Aurora

By Brock Weir

Get ready, eastern Aurora ? Aurora's 150th anniversary celebration is coming your way.

Ada Johnson Park will be the scene of a multicultural celebration on September 21 to mark Aurora's Sesquicentennial. The day-long celebration is the final party in a year-long series commemorating Aurora's 150th anniversary.

In a program celebrating Aurora's Past, Present and Future ? as well as the four seasons of Aurora ? the September 21 event is being planned to shine a spotlight on, commemorate, and celebrate the many, many cultures now represented in Aurora today.

The choice of Ada Johnson Park near Conover Boulevard was a deliberate one. Members of the Town's Aurora 150 Committee were looking for ways to bring the celebration to parts of Town east of Industrial Parkway to make sure the entire town was included in the celebrations.

?We have our date secured for September 21,? said Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora. ?Our host site is going to be Ada Johnson Park with our rain location being Rick Hansen Public School.?

The Cultural Celebration is slated to run from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m., featuring cultural displays such as art and dancing from around the world, art forms enjoyed by a diverse cross-section of Aurora residents.

?We've booked a number of acts and at least five cultural groups for dancing and music, but we don't want to give away the roster just yet,? said Aurora 150 chair Alison Collins-Mrakas. ?We're well on the way of planning and we're finalizing most of the details this Thursday.?

Following the cultural displays, party organizers plan to cap the evening beginning at 7 p.m. with a special outdoor screening of Cirque du Soleil: Worlds Away.

The Aurora Sesqui-centennial Committee is slated to meet Thursday to continue hammering out the fine details of the September 21 event. When they met last month to put everything on the table by way of a status update, they were in the midst of securing representation from locally represented cultural groups from Aboriginal performers to dancers from all around the world.

Leg work still needs to be done to ensure all groups are well represented, and this includes reaching out to organizations such as the Aurora Chamber of Commerce and Welcome Wagon to get a flavour of just how diverse Aurora is.

Outreach could also take place in local foreign language media, particularly Russian publications, as well as door knockers left at doors specifically targeted in parts of Aurora east of Industrial Parkway, and Bayview Avenue in particular.

?I think our results with the number of people who attended Dance in the Park [on Canada Day Weekend] turned out very well,? said committee member Greg Smith of their outreach strategy. ?That is a lot to do with the work of our local newspapers as well as some of our work on social media. The challenge is we have to get a lot of things in place really quickly to ramp up promotions for our September 21 event.?

For the committee, reaching out to these communities is key as they feel turnout from these areas have been a little bit less than ideal.

?These people who do not know [about the Aurora 150 Celebrations] are not making an effort to know their community,? said Ms. Ware. ?My theory is they are disengaged by choice.?

A big opportunity to reach out to these groups is the popular annual Aurora Rib Fest, which hits Machell Park from Friday,

September 6 ? Sunday, September 8 featuring the ribs and pork from restaurants from Fort Erie to Las Vegas.

With this golden opportunity to do a final plug for their final event of the Aurora 150 Celebrations, planners are going to take full advantage of it.

?It's the last event of our four,? said Ms. Collins-Mrakas. ?We're really looking forward to it. It is going to be family-friendly, but really it is cross-cultural, intergenerational, and we're really looking forward to presenting the last event in the series of four. It's going to be great, as usual, from Shelley Ware.?