

Spooky illusions will light up the sky at this Saturday's Haunted Forest



By Brock Weir

Extra-creepy surprises are in store when Aurora's Sheppard's Bush Conservation Area is transformed into a Haunted Forest.

Tickets are now on sale for the annual local spook-tacular, which welcomes ghosts and goblins of all ages to come into the woods for a few chills and thrills. The fun gets underway at 6 p.m., running through 9 p.m. on Saturday, October 25.

Each year, organizers of the Haunted Forest work overtime to keep things fresh and 2014 is no exception with staff and volunteers putting finishing touches on brand new illusions which promise to light up the night sky.

"It is something very unique," says Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora. "This is something you would see at Canada's Wonderland. Over the last six weeks we have been really trying to see if we can make it happen and it will be exciting if it all pulls together. Obviously weather is a factor, but it will be need to see if we can do it."

Ms. Ware did not want to reveal too much about just what surprises they had in store with the illusions, but LCD projectors and a hidden network of screens conspire to what she describes as a mystifying series of "thrills."

"To see something that seems ordinary and then have it transform before your eyes will make you scream," she says.

While organizers have focused significant time and energy into the illusions, it is all part of the annual creative process which takes hundreds of volunteers, including students from many local schools, who collectively put in over 500 hours to make each year's Haunted Forest a success.

"It is really stretching your creativity and your comfort zone and really thinking out of the box," says Ms. Ware of the most fun aspects of each year's festivities. "It's not like a parade where there is a complete process involved. This is really rejuvenating with new ideas, building on ideas you tried a couple of years ago, yet putting a little twist in it."

Mother nature, of course, can put twists of her own into the proceedings.

"Sheppard's Bush is really an enchanting piece of land," says Ms. Ware. "Every day we go out into the bush to visit it and it is completely different. You can go in one day and the trees are full of leaves. You can go in another day and the trees are completely stripped. It is transformed, ongoing, and really a clever piece of land that is always living, breathing, and changing."

But, of course, Aurora's Haunted Forest is less about the living and breathing and more about the cold and undead, and that is a factor which really keeps things moving along, she adds. Youth in particular find their own particular leadership roles each year in the Haunted Forest, something Ms. Ware chalks up to the popularity of such shows as The Walking Dead.

‘I think we are really putting on something that youth can really identify with,’ she says. ‘It is really for all ages. We do cater to younger children as well as older adults. With multiple trail systems we have to choose from we are able to have something very enjoyable for the younger children as well as the adults.’

Tickets for the 2014 Haunted Forest are on sale now at the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex (SARC) at \$4 per person. Due to limited parking around Sheppard's Bush, the Town of Aurora will provide a shuttle service to Sheppard's Bush from the SARC. Additional activities and games for the whole family will also be provided at the Complex.

Community groups participating in this year's event include the Optimist Club of Aurora, the Aurora Seniors' Association, the Canadian Children's Theatre Company, Marquee Theatrical Productions, and the 5th Aurora Scouts.

‘It is really nice to see how the whole community is getting involved and pulling this through,’ says Ms. Ware. ‘We actually have two students who have said they think they would like to do a career with theatrical makeup and stage makeup as what they would like to continue with after high school because they have been the ones doing the makeup for many of the volunteers. It is really rewarding to be able to see that.’

Don't forget to wear your costumes!