

A small light can dispel a lot of darkness: Menorah Lighting ceremony to be beacon for community

As the days continue to get shorter, now is the time to cast light into the darkness.

This will be a key theme when the Town comes together on Wednesday, December 1, from 6 ? 8 p.m. for the Aurora's fifth annual Menorah Lighting Ceremony at Town Hall.

Co-hosted by the Town and Chabad Aurora, it is an event for individuals and families of all faiths, and will feature live entertainment and traditional food to mark Hanukkah.

‘We’ve teamed up with the Town to bring the universal message of freedom, light over darkness, perseverance and triumph over adversity to the community in this festival of light,’ says Rabbi Yossi Hecht of Chabad Aurora. ‘It is to bring out what is in them (community members): the strength and power each individual has and the difference they can make.’

‘People sometimes feel lost and they feel isolated, especially when it comes to the holidays, and together at the Town, which really stands as a beacon of light because democracy is shining from that very beginning, we can bring that message across to so many of our residents during the holidays with this festival of lights.’

The theme of casting light into the darkness was a theme Rabbi Hecht delivered to the community at last year's Menorah Lighting Ceremony, which was held under the pall of numerous health restrictions related to COVID-19. Over the more than 20 months since COVID-19 arrived, the world has shifted and, he says, the idea of light into darkness continues to resonate more than ever.

‘When confronted with much darkness, a tiny light can dispel all,’ he says. ‘By lighting the menorah, it really brings out the idea that all it takes is a little bit ? another act of goodness or kindness ? to make a world of difference, especially in the times we find ourselves now. I think the world is at a critical moment and if there's one message we would really like to portray and amplify is one small light can dispel a whole lot of darkness.’

From the perspective of Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora, COVID has forced a lot of people to pause and reflect, often in isolation.

‘However you have been affected by COVID, we have all reflected and there has definitely been a dark time in this period,’ she says. ‘When you look at annual gatherings like the Menorah Lighting, it is a guarantee and a constant that there will be light. I think, regardless of what your faith background is, the experience of Aurora's Menorah Lighting is welcomed. Not only will you experience the transition from light to darkness, you'll experience community again and wherever your faith lies you will feel something with this.’

Hanukkah, notes Rabbi Hecht, is recognized the world over as a symbol of ‘triumph over oppression’ and of ‘spirit over matter’ that could be celebrated and should be celebrated by all.

While details on the Menorah Lighting program are still being finalized, and are subject to change pending any modifications in public health guidelines as a result of the ongoing pandemic, organizers promise a blend of tradition ? latkes, jelly donuts, and the Menorah lighting itself ? along with some elements of surprise, all designed to create a joyous atmosphere for the whole family.

And celebrations are not limited to just December 1.

Through the GooseChase app, the Town has developed an eight-day virtual community program where, according to Ms. Ware, ‘people will be encouraged in a friendly competition manner to complete as many missions for their families as possible throughout the eight days of Hanukkah.’

"This will lengthen your experience with the celebrations," she says, "as Jewish families are very busy during Hanukkah with eight days of prayer and celebration."

"And they do put on a lot of weight," interjects Rabbi Hecht with a laugh, looking ahead to the tasty treats that are part and parcel of the holiday.

"We always want to add one good deed because one good deed triggers another," he continues on the eight-day observance. "We light one candle the night before, and we're going to add onto it now. Every small act of goodness, every little bit of light continues. What we did yesterday is not enough for today. What we do today is not enough for tomorrow. We always have to add in our goodness and kindness and bring light into the world."

Agrees Ms. Ware: "Every day we have choices and we can't count how many decisions we make in a day. As you choose to determine how to spend your evening on December 1, why not come out to the Menorah Lighting. If you haven't experienced one, you're really in for a treat."

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter