

Artists hope Canada150 Mosaic will leave lasting legacy



By Brock Weir

Festivals and events come and go, and memories linger for only so long. Art, however, has the potential to stand the test of time and local artists hope a new project will be a lasting legacy of Canada's 150th Anniversary.

Local artists are hard at work brainstorming ideas on what will eventually be a huge art project with the potential to involve hundreds, if not thousands, of residents.

Thanks to some creative re-thinking of some money initially set aside from a proposed ? but, for various logistical reasons, ultimately cancelled ? military tattoo to mark the milestone, the Canada 150 Mural Mosaic Project is now a go.

With an \$18,000 infusion from the Canada 150 Budget, Aurora will now participate in the project, creating an 8' by 12' mural designed by Canadian artist Lewis Lavoile, which is uniting communities across the nation in the creation of a multi-part mosaic. The Aurora portion of the mosaic will include 600 tiles which local artists will design, facilitate, and oversee a number of community-painting events involving all Aurorans of all ages.

The project was first brought to local attention by artist Christine Valentini who, after a chance encounter with a niece just returning from a mural painting project, delved deeper into the vision.

?I thought it was a perfect match for what we were talking about,? says Ms. Valentini. ?We were thinking about doing a mural of our own at one point and this, I thought, was a good way of getting people involved, children involved, and have a legacy in Aurora that people can participate in.?

From those initial seeds of inspiration, a garden of ideas ? and enthusiastic advocates ? began to take root. The number of interested artists snowballed, and realtor Eric McCartney got involved to help them navigate through the proper channels of bureaucracy. Ultimately, their efforts paid off. Now the hard part begins: coming up with the best representations of Aurora to include in the mosaic and figuring out the best times for the community painting parties essential to getting it off the ground.

?We design the mural and then they go ahead and break it into manageable little tiles,? explains artist Judy Sherman. ?Then they give everyone a tile to paint, breaking it into various colours to make it work in a big mural. Ultimately, people can paint what they want in the square as long as it is in the colour that has been allocated.?

Adds Ms. Valentini: ?They are guiding us through it and what will work and what won't. [Lewis] is guiding us in our vision, but it has to be Aurora-based. We have a wonderful mural at Yonge and Wellington but it is based in all of Canada. We want this to be Aurora-based.?

Ideas currently being bandied about by the collective include the historic train station, Hillary House, the garden at Merlin's Hollow, the trumpeter swans lovingly fostered by Harry Lumsden, the ubiquitous Fleury Plow and, of course, the Aurora Borealis itself.

?That will be the fun part,? says artist Eva Folks. ?We also have to think about what was here 150 years ago compared to what is here now because this is our 150th anniversary.?

With a final design plan still some ways away, they are working with the Town to figure out the best times and locations for these community painting parties to attract the maximum number of people. However it shakes down, and whatever it looks like in the end,

they aim for the finished product to be something all Aurorans can be proud of for generations.

?It is a legacy that will stay with Aurora for many years, and it would be nice if it was placed in a new area with a lot of people,? says Ms. Folks.

From Ms. Sherman's perspective, the first candidate location is just on the horizon.

?We have been talking about how the Town I changing and evolving and how Library Square is changing and evolving, so it would be nice to have it go into some place where there is new stuff happening and this mural can be a part of it.?

Ms. Valentini is of the same mindset.

?Festivals come and go but nothing is left behind,? she says. ?A mural is something that will be there for a long, long time.?