

Aurora Farmers' Market celebrates 20 years of 'Shop Local'?



Shopping local is more important now than ever before.

It's a movement that has seen something of a resurgence since the start of the global pandemic, but is a philosophy that has driven the Aurora Farmers' Market since its inception in 2002.

Now, as the Market prepares to launch its 20th anniversary season at Town Park this Saturday, May 7, local organizers and vendors are excited to make new connections and renew old acquaintances.

Set to welcome patrons from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m., it's going to be a very special season for the little market that could, which started off life in a parking lot just off Temperance Street.

'It's going to be 20 years of magic,' says Councillor Sandra Humfries, who serves as a liaison between the Market and Council.

Saturday's opening will feature music spun by local vinyl historian David Heard, a sold-out complement of vendors, and, perhaps most important to organizers, a Market experience that is free from public health restrictions.

'We are just going to be open, happy, and it is just going to be wonderful,' says Market chair Cathy Williams of Catharina's Kitchen. 'There's no prescribed entry point anymore and people can just come into the park from [whatever point] they want. Our vendors are so happy we don't have to wear masks. They are so happy to be coming back. It has been a tough time for a lot of businesses and coming back is going to be good for a lot of people' and I hear from a lot of customers that they are just so excited the Market is going to be open again.'

Over the last two years, the Aurora Farmers' Market has been a success story.

It was uncertain until the eleventh hour in the first COVID spring whether the Market would be able to re-open at all.

Not wanting to lose the momentum they had built over the previous 17 years, the Market Board set to work exploring different ways to make the shopping experience a reality.

The model they eventually locked into place not only ensured a safe re-opening that May, but their successful template was borrowed by similar markets across southern Ontario, including the City of Toronto.

?We did what we needed to do to keep the community safe, and keep the vendors safe,? says Market Board member Kris Waters.

Adds Councillor Humfries: ?And there was not one case, not one issue, not one problem.?

?For me, what stands out is the joy of the Market,? she continues. ?I have heard from residents that they had that window of time each Saturday to feel normal, they loved every minute. You don't know what you've got until it's gone and now they know. We had huge turnouts last year, record numbers, and I think turnout is going to be better than ever!?

Helping to make that prediction come true will be new vendors joining customer favourites, the return of crafts for kids, a feature that had to be put on the backburner previously due to public health restrictions, live music from the band shell most Saturdays, and a number of special event days, the first one being a celebration of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee on the morning of June 4.

For more information on the Aurora Farmers' Market, visit: theaurorafarmersmarket.com.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter