

Aurora Pride Festival sashays into 'Just Peachy' second year



Aurora's first Pride Festival last year was one for the books, and organizers and community partners, are sashaying forward to a second-annual success.

Aurora's 2026 Pride Festival, hosted by the Aurora Community Band (ACB) and the Borealis Big Band, in partnership with the Town of Aurora and York Pride, will take place at Aurora Town Square on Sunday, May 31, from 1 to 5 p.m., and volunteers bringing the program together promise an afternoon of family-friendly fun that is even bigger than last year.

'Last year was really about launching something meaningful. This year is really about building momentum on that given how many people attended and had such a fantastic time,' says Warren Fetterly of the Aurora Community Band (ACB), who is once again co-organizing the Festival with Gord Shephard, leader of both the ACB and the Borealis Big Band. 'Our model is really based in music and art being the conduit to have and share acceptance. Both bands are coming back this year with excellent sets of Pride-inspired music curated by Gord, which is amazing, we're having a drag entertainer, Just Peachy, come out and add a little glitter and glitz to Brevik Hall, and we're adding a new table, the Sugar & Sass Dessert Bar with Pride-inspired treats.'

This year, the Aurora Cultural Centre is taking on an added role with a curated art display in the Centre's Great Hall Gallery.

At the end of the day, the event is about 'coming together to celebrate diversity, inclusion, and community in the heart of Aurora.'

Doors open at 1 p.m. with interactive displays from local arts organizations, businesses, and Pride organizations, along with a chance to have your photo taken with Just Peachy. Opening ceremonies will follow at 1.15 p.m., with messages from Mayor Tom Mrakas, Aurora Town Square's Phil Rose, and York Pride's Jacob Gal.

Entertainment will get underway at 2 p.m. with the Borealis Big Band in the Aurora Town Square Performance Hall, at 3 p.m. with interactive displays and Pride-inspired activities 'think a wig-off' led by Just Peachy, and return to the Performance Hall at 4 p.m. with the Aurora Community Band and a special lip-sync performance from Just Peachy.

Participating organizations and businesses include Aurora Town Square, York Pride, the Aurora Black Community Association, Aurora Cultural Centre, Aurora Historical Society, Aurora Museum & Archives, Aurora Public Library, Dave's Vinyl Party, Marquee Theatrical Productions, My Indie Coffee, Pflag, Pine Tree Potters Guild, SOYRA (Society of York Region Artists), the Town of Aurora's Sport and Recreation Departments, and Theatre Aurora.

'One of the greatest successes of last year was we were able to get so many of the community organizations from Aurora to participate in the Festival and demonstrate their support for the Pride community,' says Shephard. 'The fact they're all coming back

again this year to be a part of the festival I think is a really great indication that the event was successful. I'm really concerned about providing an opportunity for the citizens of Aurora and for the organizations, be it businesses or arts organizations, to have an opportunity in an overt way to display their support for Pride.

?I think the band performances alone make it worthwhile coming out to it. Then we have all these wonderful activities that are going to be occurring before and during the hour-long intermission between the two bands. It wasn't unexpected, but maybe something that happened last year that we were really happy about was the atmosphere and the vibe of the whole event was really great. I think it's going to be better this year because we've given more time for that, and there are going to be more activities that are going to be occurring between the two band performances. We're looking forward to seeing how that works, but I think it's going to be really great.?

If Shephard's favourite takeaway from the inaugural event was seeing the community come together, it's a sentiment shared by Fetterly, but through a different lens:

?It was having my transgendered son, for the first time, be in a space that was curated more to him, and him feeling comfortable and opening up more than he normally would in public ? it was pretty cool!?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter