

Aurora's trails are yours to discover Sunday -- and every day



By Brock Weir

There's a way you can get to where you need to go in Aurora by avoiding just about all forms of traffic, and few people even realise its there ? but Aurora's extensive trail system will be in the spotlight this Sunday, June 24, with Open Trails Aurora.

Spearheaded by Activate Aurora, in conjunction with the Bike Aurora, the Aurora Community Arboretum, Chartwell, Trek Bicycle Store, and CHATS (Community & Home Assistance to Seniors), Open Trails encourages pedestrians, cyclists, and even the curious to come out and discover ? or rediscover ? a hidden gem right in your back yard.

?It has always been an issue that our trails are really good, but we have never seen them crowded ? but we would like to see them crowded! ? says Activate Aurora's Ron Weese. ?This is a great opportunity. Walking is the number one activity identified by Aurorans in a number of surveys and we have one of the best trails systems around; unfortunately, we're not getting a number of people on them. The idea here was to [look at] why aren't people using the trails and how can we introduce them??

One person who is a ?frequent flyer? of the trails is Shawn Nisbet, a nutritionist, who will be stationed at Sheppard's Bush on Sunday to lead a free demonstration of Nordic pole walking at 9.30, 10.30 and 11 a.m., and introduce new users to its benefits.

?I have been teaching at Sheppard's Bush with free clinics for over 34 years and I still get people who live in Aurora who say, ?I didn't know this was here,' and they have lived here their entire life, ? says Ms. Nisbet. ?That is good in a way because it is nice and peaceful, but it would be great if they knew it. ?

Ms. Nisbet and her Nordic pole walking demonstrations will just be one of the many featured attractions that will be dotted along the trails system.

CHATS and the Activate Aurora Seniors Network, which includes Chartwell Residences among its members, will lead an ?Intergenerational Walk? along mobility-friendly asphalt-paved sections of the trails from 1 ? 3 p.m., starting at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex.

?CHATS is interested in keeping seniors healthy and active in their community and keeping them well at home and helping them with their independence and this all helps with that, ? says CHATS' Rhonda Flanagan. ?By getting seniors out and involved in physical activity that they may not even know is right at their doorstep, we'll be able to facilitate their independence, it gets them out and engaged, gets them out talking to people of all generations, an it is something they can do with their grandchildren. ?

The results are clear for care workers and staff at Chartwell Hollandview Trail, which backs onto the Aurora Community Arboretum

and the local trails network.

Chartwell Hollandview regularly brings their residents out to enjoy the trails and get out into nature. Some of the residents, a number of whom are upwards of 100, are able to access the trails themselves. Others who might not be able to do so, take advantage of regular bus trips to more mobility-friendly sections.

'We just hope that by sharing our story where there are seniors upwards of 100 years old enjoying the trails to come in and use it, other seniors in the community will look to do that as well,' says Chartwell's Laura Ciarallo.

Adds colleague Jasmine Kakush: 'On Tuesday, I took about 16 of our residents and we did a whole walk around the park. They are just so excited to be active. Why not have that atmosphere for everybody?'

Throughout the Aurora Community Arboretum from 1 - 3 p.m., Arboretum experts will be on hand to answer questions about this very special feature on the Town's trails system.

'Even though it is over 100 acres, so many people don't realise it is an Arboretum,' says Ms. Webb. 'Some people might just think of it as Lambert Willson Park, it is this or that, they don't realise the whole thing is an arboretum. They don't realise how many different types of trails we've got. We have gravel, we have grass, miles of trails, and it is just the most beautiful place in town and we're so lucky to have it. We want people to come out and enjoy it.'

One of the main entrances to the Aurora Community Arboretum is at the Aurora Seniors' Centre on John West Way, and it is here that Bike Aurora, an offshoot of the Town's Trails & Active Transportation Committee, will be meeting the needs of cyclists.

Working in conjunction with the Aurora Bike Shop and Trek Bicycle Store, they will present a bike safety and maintenance clinic while holding demonstrations of e-bikes and more.

'The original mission of Bike Aurora was to bring more awareness of the trails because we are part of the trails and active transportation committee,' said Laura Lueloff of the mandate of Bike Aurora, which had its inaugural event wiped out last year due to heavy rains. 'We don't have statistics on this, but we know there is a true unawareness that Aurora has close to 60 km of interconnected trails and part of our goal was not just to introduce people to the trails who perhaps never explored them before but also offer a bit of enhanced information to people who might just know the arboretum and not realise that you can get on the trail in northwest Aurora and pretty much connect it through and end up at the farmers' market or end up at the arboretum.'

And then, as you explore nature, you can explore aspects of your own Town as well.

Hidden Aurora, an online scavenger hunt developed by Mark Kolb, will be active in bringing up the history of the land underfoot.

'There are secrets already hidden in plain sight in the Arboretum,' teases Mr. Kolb.