

Budding chefs invited to come out for some friendly Family Day competition



By Brock Weir

If you have ever flipped on shows like Chopped Canada Junior and wanted your chance to duke it out in the kitchen for culinary supremacy, you may soon have your chance much closer to home.

The Town of Aurora is now accepting applications for what they hope will become the first annual Junior Chef Competition, which could be a centrepiece of next month's Family Day celebrations ? Aurora's annual Arctic Adventure.

A call for all budding Junior Chefs, the Town is now accepting applications for youth between the ages of 9 to 14 to step into the kitchen and do friendly battle with their peers -- and having their work reviewed by a real professional chef.

Applications must be received by the Town by Wednesday, February 4, and if they have at least four participants, the new Junior Chef Competition will take place in the historic Aurora Armoury.

?Everyone who participates is going to make one dish,? says Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora.

?The base of the dish is going to be consistent, but the contents of the mystery box might change ? and the number of participants we have overall will determine how we structure the challenge but I can't even say what the cooking apparatus is because it will give away what the base of the dish is! The base dish will be consistent, but the items in the box is where their innovation is going to come from.?

Depending on the number of participants, Junior Chefs might have to show off their culinary skills in heats. The culinary masterpieces will be sampled by a panel of judges ? including at least one professional chef and members of Aurora's Youth Engagement Committee ? who will use their eyes and taste buds to evaluate the taste and appeal of the dish, how it looks, the final presentation, and how the Junior Chefs used the ingredients in the mystery box.

?You can try many different things and the dish could literally fall apart at the execution mark, or it could turn out to be a home run!?! says Ms. Ware.

With the inclusion of a professional teaching kitchen at the revamped Aurora Family Leisure Complex, Aurora has hosted a Junior Chef summer camp for the past two years, as well as additional Junior Chef programs in the spring and fall. Ms. Ware says the uptake of the program is a clear indication that there is an ?appetite? amongst Aurora youth to become more involved in cooking ? thanks in no small part to shows like Chopped Canada Junior.

?Those shows have such an appeal that we thought, why not try it?? she says. ?Clearly this is new territory for us, but we want to make that competition available for the youth. We're providing a really unique experience for the youth, who will be supported by their families. The competition is on Family Day and one of the requirements for the youth participating is they have a guardian with them for support. I think it will be a fabulous opportunity between today and the competition for families to spend time in the kitchen preparing meals.

?Maybe you have children who already like the process of cooking, but maybe this is also a new family tradition that you can introduce into your household. I know in our generation it was always the parents who did the cooking, but in this new generation coming up, they are a lot more hands-on, so whether or not a child has taken one of our programs, I do believe there is a culinary interest out there, and this is a great family time experience they can have as well because if they do register for the competition, they have that motivating factor to be prepared for February 20. Maybe some families will be trying some dinner dishes or breakfast dishes to formulate or make themselves.?

And the best part? While there might be a chef whose dish does ultimately reign supreme, it is all about fun and nobody is going to get chopped. All participants will get a certificate recognizing both their participation and their experience.

?We want to provide a new experience that is going to be focused on fun, not on being chopped,? says Ms. Ware. We're hoping that as Arctic Adventure is on Family Day and as these youth prepare for the competition, hopefully it is an opportunity for them to spend time as a family as they prepare or get warmed up with their culinary skills between now and the day.?

If you ? or your parents ? think you have what it takes, visit www.aurora.ca/arcticadventure to apply for the Junior Chef Competition. The deadline to register is Wednesday, February 1.