

Canada's Birthday Town goes virtual for red-and-white celebration

Aurora is not letting restrictions surrounding COVID-19 tarnish its reputation as Canada's Birthday Town. Instead, Aurora will be defending the crown in a virtual way this Canada Day.

While favourite Canada Day activities like the Yonge Street parade, day-long festivities and fireworks at Lambert Willson Park are now fully on ice until the summer of 2021, plans are shaping up for a week-long virtual Canada Day celebration that looks back at our past, celebrates our present and looks forward to the future.

Canada Day Celebrations will kick off later this month with the launch of a Canada Pride window and front lawn decorating contest, encouraging people to go all out in red and white.

"Through social media, we want to compile a 'flipping parade' where you can flip through these photos and see all these houses and decorated windows," says Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora. "We want to have this parade experience ready by June 30 so people can decorate their homes in the one-to-two weeks prior to that, building up the excitement leading to those activities."

As organizers compile the 'flipping parade', curators and staff at the Aurora Museum and Archives will also launch a video illustrating how Aurora earned the moniker of 'Canada's Birthday Town' in the first place.

"A lot of people see the photos and logos, but they don't know the nuts and bolts as to how it came to be," says Ms. Ware. "We're hoping for that to be a very entertaining piece. This year is also the 40th anniversary of O Canada becoming our National Anthem so we want to have a little bit of fun with this by involving our members of Council and hopefully seeing what their musical talents might be."

Traditionally, Canada Day festivities kick off with Dance in the Park, a party organized by the Rotary Club of Aurora at Town Park, on June 30. While the dance is not happening this year, the date will be the springboard to further online celebrations.

"We are moving forward with a virtual fireworks experience as well as some programming such as fire juggling and an aerialist performance and other entertaining features," says Ms. Ware. "We're going to have a really strong online presence for interactive activities, which we hope will be very actively engaged by the community for the entire week of Canada Day, not just on the one day."

"On Canada Day Morning, we will be starting with a greeting by the Mayor and that is when we will have the Museum's video of our history. We know that Ottawa is going to be doing a noontime broadcast between

12 and 1 p.m., so we will be staying quiet on our social media channels during that time and then in the afternoon we will be having a huge variety of activities voted onto our website, which will be designed by Aurora as well as the Federal Government.

?Some of these activities will be a DIY Learn How To Paint. For the foodies, there will be Canadian recipes they can try to work through. There will be activities based on the symbolism and history of Canada. Our team has come up with 13 customized crossword puzzles, one for every single province and territory, which is quite educational. Not just your ordinary colouring sheets, but we've made one customed to each Province and Territory with their historical landmarks, facts and claims to fame. We have pulled together a montage of experiences which come with a relaxed timeline that enables families to tune in when they choose to and also, when they're not, there's lots of physical activity and wellness activities they can actually go out and be active with.?

These are unusual circumstances, to be sure, and the response from the Town in making sure the show does go on is unusual as well, but Ms. Ware says she and her team are enjoying rising to the challenge.

?There was a lot of effort and passion in trying to put together not just online activities but meaningful online activities,? she says. ?They know that families have had lots of screen time recently, so we wanted to make sure that what we load up is meaningful, interesting and that everybody, regardless of age, learns something about Canada, because it is our national holiday to celebrate, but it is also our holiday to be proud and learn about ourselves.

?Hopefully through some of these online experiences, people will learn, be engaged, and hopefully have fun with what we have planned. Virtual experiences, obviously, are limited in what you can and cannot do and, of course, everything has been quick timelines to be able to pull things together ? but it is not just pulling things together; we want it to be meaningful, which has been the number one objective all along.?

For more on Aurora's virtual Canada Day Celebrations, visit aurora.ca/canadaday.

By Brock Weir