

Canadian Food & Wine Institute coming to Armoury



By Brock Weir

The historic Aurora Armoury will become an extension of the Canadian Food & Wine Institute at Niagara College, the Town announced Friday.

In a statement, the Town said it is ?thrilled? to announce a partnership with the Canadian Food & Wine Institute (CFWI) at Niagara College.

The partnership will entail short-term and part-time training at a restored Armoury which will become ?a vibrant, community gathering space and a home to a world class training facility specializing in culinary skill building, commercial brewing and viticulture.?

?This partnership is the perfect match,? said Mayor Geoff Dawe in a statement. ?We?ve been able to take a prestigious school and match it up with an equally prestigious building. This is going to provide the Town with some very special community space while offering state-of-art training opportunities for residents and visitors.?

Added Craig Youdale, Dean of Niagara College's Canadian Food and Wine Institute: ?Recognition is growing for the expertise the CFWI has cultivated in the culinary, wine and beer sciences, and we're excited to share our unique expertise with new audiences.?

Negotiations between the Town of Aurora and Niagara College have been taking place behind closed doors for more than a year. What was known was the Armoury was the subject of talks, but there was no hint on what the nature of the talks might have been, leading to speculation throughout the community.

According to the details that have been hammered out, the Town will continue to own and maintain the historic building, make investments needed to convert the building into ?a world class training facility? and the CFWI will operate there, offering what the Town describes as ?the same signature training programs also offered at Niagara College's specialized campuses in Niagara.?

?Through the Canadian Food & Wine Institute, Niagara College will introduce its Expert Edge Corporate Training facility into the heart of Downtown Aurora,? said the Town in the announcement. ?Expert Edge delivers one-time training or part-time instruction to industry professionals, enthusiasts and for team-building exercises in an intimate and unmatched learning environment.?

?Bringing our Expert Edge training to Aurora reflects the mandate of the CFWI to develop the food, wine and beer industries not only in Niagara, but across the country,? added Mr. Youdale.

The facility will include an incubator space, a culinary demonstration theatre, as well as a wine and beverage sensory lab.

Councillor Paul Pirri has been a long-time advocate of bringing a microbrewery incubator to the Town as a way of promoting small business development and providing space for industry partners to network and collaborate.

?As soon as I brought my idea to staff, they took it and ran with it,? said Councillor Pirri in a statement. ?They did a phenomenal job in bringing this partnership to fruition. I am excited that Council has embraced the vision of bringing something truly unique and exciting to the Town.?

Less enthusiastic about the plan has been Councillor John Abel who has, at the public Council table, often spoken against the lease

deal which was, up to that point, still an unknown.

As late as Tuesday, when Council received a presentation on how the Aurora Armoury might be renovated and updated at a total cost of \$4 million funded from Hydro Reserves, he said the Armoury would be better used as ?community space.?

?We keep hearing that post-secondary is going to help us, but how is it going to help us?? he said, suggesting a better plan would have been to lease space above a local restaurant at Wellington Street and Berczy Street, for the purposes of post secondary while keeping the Armoury for programming. ?We could have that space for us and still have post secondary right there, but we didn't have any options. We should never have offered the Armoury because it belongs to the community. We never should have gone into closed session.?

The benefits of bringing an arm of the Canadian Food and & Wine institute to Aurora, however, were clear to proponents of the plan.

Councillor Tom Mrakas, for instance, said the deal was an ?exciting opportunity? to achieve a goal of Aurora's Strategic Plan, which is to secure a post-secondary presence for the community.

?It is a great economic development opportunity for the Town,? he said. ?The Armoury is the ideal place because it is part of the larger picture within our Cultural Precinct. It was a good fit for Niagara College because they felt the historic value within the building and the opportunity provide, in essence, food, wine and craft beer during [events in the park] and the more we looked at it from a staff perspective and also from a Council perspective we agreed it was a really good fit to be there.?

Mayor Dawe was on the same wavelength, telling The Auroran after the announcement was made at the end of last week that it will ?highlight more reasons to come down to Town Park to further revitalize the Town Park and Downtown Area.?

?I think it will be a great attraction,? he said. ?We have signed the lease, it goes to Council for approval in terms of looking how the building is going to come about and then we get to work and start fixing up the old Armoury and getting it ready for the college. Ideally, they would like to be up and running by next fall so they get that school year in. That is certainly something we will be shooting for.?