

Celebrate the start of Hanukkah next Sunday at Menorah lighting

Celebrate the start of the Jewish Festival of Lights next Sunday, December 22, at a special Menorah Lighting Ceremony at Town Hall.

The start of Hanukkah will be marked with the lighting of a giant menorah in the forecourt of Town Hall on John West Way with family-friendly activities running from 4 ? 6 p.m.

Festivities will include not only the lighting of the menorah itself, presided over by local dignitaries and officials from Chabad Aurora, but also live music, traditional celebratory foods, and children's crafts.

?At last year's Menorah Ceremony, we lit the first candle on the fourth day, but this year's celebration we're able to light the first candle on the first day of Hanukkah,? says Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora, who is co-organizing this year's event with Chabad Aurora's Rabbi Yossi Hecht. ?We really want to emphasize this event is inclusive, so even if there are some people who don't have a Jewish background, we want everyone to feel comfortable in coming out, celebrating and learning ? as well as ask any questions and settle any curiosity. As everyone knows, we just finished our Christmas market, so it is quite nice that we have another celebration that is widely celebrated at this time of year.

?Our main objective is to ensure this ceremony is authentic as possible. There will be more than 1,500 Hanukkah celebrations across Ontario that particular week and although we want to make it authentic, we want to have some unique things to it as well and, of course, make it a fun and inviting evening.?

Paramount in achieving these goals, says Ms. Ware, is the participation of Chabad Aurora, which has been integral in the planning of these public ceremonies for the last three years.

?It has been an essential partnership,? she says. ?Rabbi Hecht has provided great leadership and [have brought in] authentic features. One of the elements is going to be the traditional foods available in samples at the event. It is through these partnerships that we're actually able to get the kosher-approved foods that are authentic to be served at a function like this.?

Previous year's food selections have included authentic potato latkes and jelly donuts.

?Also, our crafts for children have been specifically sourced from a kosher provider as well so that authenticity fits with what the overall celebration is about. The fire guy will be doing his fire show. We have a Hanukkah based band that will be coming up to do the singing. There are

indoor and outdoor activities. Whatever the weather proves to be on Sunday, December 22, we have offerings in both environments.?

Over the years of helping to plan this seasonal gathering, Ms. Ware says her eyes have been opened to just how large the local Jewish community is and how important a menorah lighting ceremony is in bringing not just the Jewish community, but the many faith and cultural communities that make up Aurora, together in a festive, collaborative spirit.

?At last year's event, the real sentiment I got was an emotional one, that families were so happy and so touched emotionally that there was this kind of celebration offered in Aurora and they didn't have to go to other communities,? says Ms. Ware. ?It will be very interesting to see how much the event grows this year, now that there are two years where this has been done and awareness is growing with it.?

For more information on Aurora's Menorah Lighting Ceremony, visit aurora.ca.

By Brock Weir