

Community celebration set for next Friday to mark 150th of Town Park



By Brock Weir

Canada might be the recipient of most of the 150 love these days, but Aurora will extend this love to Town Park next Friday, June 30, as it marks its 150th anniversary in the heart of the community.

Organized by the Aurora Museum & Archives, in conjunction with the Rotary Club of Aurora, ahead of that evening's traditional concert and dance party, Party in the Park will take that community-mindedness to heart and Town Park back to its roots.

Starting at 4 p.m., and running through 11 p.m., events include an old-fashioned parade calling on kids to decorate their bikes, wagons, skateboards, scooters, strollers and even themselves with prizes for top entries.

‘The parade was really inspired by the latter half of the 20th century when these were really commonplace,’ says Michelle Johnson of the Aurora Museum & Archives. ‘This will harken back to activities that used to happen. We will have different activities and games like a three-legged race, a potato sack race, really basic events, but events that were commonplace at Town Park. This is a chance for us to bring those aspects of community celebrations back to Town Park and back to that landscape that hosted events for 150 years. It is a nice throwback.’

Town Park, she says, has been a ‘gathering place’ almost since Aurora was established four years before the park itself. They have grown up together and it has played host not just for big celebrations, but also athletes as a sports field, students as the playground for nearby schools, and, with the historic armoury built on the northeast corner, a centre for local military operations.

‘It is important that in light of everything that is going on worldwide that we pause and remember what we have as similarities in the community,’ says Museum curator Shawna White. ‘Town Park has always been a place to come together as a community.

Celebrating its 150th we can bring everybody together. Aurora has changed dramatically but there is still that core underlying human element and the similarities we need to focus on more and come together as a community rather than looking for differences. We

love Aurora, we live here and work here, and let's come together in a place that has always been there for the community to come together.

?There is a misconception that it is just a neighbourhood park. While the local neighbours do use it more than other residents, it is a park for the entire town. That is borne out by events that happen here like Concerts in the Park, Movies in the Park, the outdoor skating rink in the winter, and Arctic Adventure.?

In addition to the traditional family activities, Friday's party feature crafts, traditional Anishnaabe storytelling by Kim Wheatley, and will make use of the Armoury showcasing the official launch of the Museum & Archives' online exhibition celebrating the history of the park itself.

The permanent online exhibition will feature memories and photos contributed by community-members past and present.

While you will be able to explore Town Park's virtual history, you will also be able to go hands-on with some original artefacts uncovered from the Museum's archives.

?I am really looking forward to seeing the Town Park animated,? says Ms. White. ?So often [at many Town Park events you see] people sitting around on chairs watching things unfold, but we're going to have things going on throughout the Park. The Parade is going to go up and down the centre and, if traffic isn't too bad, maybe around the perimeter. Then there is the actual music that comes with the Dance in the Park at night. I would like to see this entire place come to life as we see in so many of the historical events that took place there.?

Adds Ms. Johnson: ?, I am excited to see how the party unfolds and see the people coming together and bringing out the essence of this park in real time.?

If you're getting crafty with decorating your bikes, skateboards and yourselves for the parade, don't forget to pre-register, if you can, through the Town of Aurora's e-Play program (aurora.ca). Registration will guarantee you a rosette ribbon for parade entry and, if your efforts rise to the top, a mammoth rosette and secret gift prize!