

Culture Days will be three-week showcase of arts, culture and heritage

Arts, culture and heritage will be firmly in the spotlight this month as Aurora takes part in Culture Days.

Taking place from September 19 to October 12, the three-week series of events will showcase local historic sites through Doors Open, the music and dance of the cultures that call Aurora home as the Town hosts its annual Multicultural Festival, and much more as community groups like the Pine Tree Potters Guild, Society of York Region Artists (SOYRA), the Aurora Community Band and Borealis Big Band, and more put the finishing touches on programs.

Saturday, September 20 will kick-start a big weekend for Culture Days as the Aurora Multicultural Festival returns to Town Park from 9 a.m. to 12 noon, before moving to Aurora Town Square from 12.30 to 6 p.m.

"This exciting festival will include vibrant cultural performance shows, sample appetizers from around the world, an interactive Community Zone and fun activities for the whole family!" say organizers. "Experience how other cultures celebrate song and dance with a fully-packed entertainment line-up. And don't miss the free samples at Aurora Town Square, as we celebrate food from around the world."

Also on September 20, the York Chamber Ensemble will offer a free concert at the Aurora Public Library that will be "sure to captivate your ears and lift your spirits." The concert will get underway at 2 p.m. in the Library's "Living Room" space.

The Society of York Region Artists (SOYRA) will be at Town Hall on Saturday, September 20, and Sunday, September 21, with their 38th annual SOYRA Fall Art Show & Sale, while the Sunday will also see the return of Doors Open Aurora from 10 ? 4 p.m. at various sites around the community.

"We're very excited to bring it back this year," says Nichole Campsall, Cultural Development Coordinator for the Town of Aurora. "There are various sites throughout Aurora that are participating and we will have quite a few activations at Town Square. A few of our cultural partners are also participating, so we're very excited." The Aurora Cultural Centre, the Aurora Public Library, Pine Tree Potters, are all part of Doors Open."

Doors Open, adds Phil Rose, Manager of Cultural Services for the Town of Aurora, has been a "fun project to work on" as the Aurora Museum & Archives has curated a variety of sites and activations for the schedule.

"A lot of the sites that we are making available for Doors Open, some of them are available to the public on a regular basis, but really the criteria for Doors Open is if you're allowing access to Heritage properties that aren't typically available to the public 364 days a year, that one day of the year is an opportunity to open those spaces."

Offerings on September 21 include a chance to watch members of the Pine Tree Potters Guild "bring the clay to life" at the Aurora Public Library from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.; a woodcarving workshop hosted by the Aurora Cultural Centre from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., and watercolour workshops for an array of ages throughout the day.

Closing out programs on September 21 is an open rehearsal from the Aurora Community Band, which members of the public are invited to attend in the Aurora Cultural Centre's Brevik Hall from 7 ? 9 p.m. Another open rehearsal, this time by the Borealis Big Band, will take place on Wednesday, September 24, from 7.30 ? 9.30 p.m. in the same location.

Rounding out the program so far, as new events are being added all the time, is a free intro to ballroom dance hosted by T&S Dance Club at Aurora Town Square at various times on Friday, September 26; the unveiling of a new community mural, Unity on Canvas: Painting our Community Story, on Monday, October 6, at 6 p.m. at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex; and the "Fall Faves" event at Mirkopoulos Platia ? Aurora Town Square's outdoor space ? on Saturday, October 11 from 10 a.m. to 12 noon, featuring outdoor games, a story time with the Aurora Public Library, line dancing with New Age Country Entertainment, and more.

"We are excited to bring back our Fall Faves Festival," says Campsall. "Last year, as part of the [Aurora Town Square] grand opening, we had our free family event here in the outdoor square and we had a pumpkin carving-themed story time with the Aurora Public Library, there were photo ops and outdoor games, and we're very excited to bring that back this year. It's on the Saturday of Thanksgiving, so it is a great way to celebrate fall."

As the programs come together, organizers are eager to showcase all the cultural elements Aurora has to offer, particularly as the Town's Cultural Action Plan and Public Art Policy continue to take shape.

"I think culture, starting with the letter 'C' really stands for community and as we develop [programs] it's really brainstorming what the community is already doing well and it really defines collaboration with the programming the Town is doing and marrying that up with what the community organizations are also doing," says Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora. "In terms of our specific programming, we routinely look for gaps, gaps in services, gaps in offerings, but culture is ever-evolving. It'll never be completed, it'll never be a one-and-done, so because of that, that's what makes it a creative canvas each year to look at; what did we do last year, what can we do differently this year, and then what are our partners doing so, again, we can focus on any gaps."

Adds Campsall: "It's a unique representation of Aurora in that we have the participation from all of our cultural partners. When Shelley says you don't know what to expect, they look at their expertise and what they have to offer and that's where they build what their programming is going to be. I think that's just such a neat thing to see. It shows you what there really is here in Aurora, that you might not already know is here. The community can really look at visual arts, performing arts, heritage. There's so much to do here!"

For an up-to-date list of Culture Days programs, including a full schedule for the Multicultural Festival and list of sites and activities associated with Doors Open, visit aurora.ca/culturedays.

By Brock Weir
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