

Culture is stronger together, says Aurora Roundtable



By Brock Weir

King Arthur may have had his roundtable, but Aurora's cultural scene has Jane Taylor and Reccia Mandelcorn to maintain its honour.

Both women, Ms. Taylor of the Aurora Cultural Centre and Ms. Mandelcorn of the Aurora Public Library, help spearhead the Aurora Cultural Roundtable, a group which brings together the collective brainpower and resources of not just the respective organizations, but also the Aurora Historical Society, Aurora Farmers' Market, and Theatre Aurora.

Now going into their second year as a collective, the group is busy putting the finishing touches on a program for Culture Days next month which promises to be a feast for the senses, and a source of food for the mind, body and the soul.

‘The Aurora Cultural Roundtable is the name the group eventually came up with after much deliberation,’ says Ms. Mandelcorn. ‘Jane and I had collaborated on items before and we had been talking about how wonderful it would be to have the Library and the Cultural Centre collaborate on some individual programs. At the same time, and parallel to that, there was a conversation going on between our CEO and [Cultural Centre Executive Director] Laura Schembri about the need for some of the cultural organizations in Aurora to be able to talk, share, and collaborate.’

Their first meeting took place in June of 2012. From there, they looked at ‘culture’ from a very broad perspective. Bringing together the Market and Theatre, they aimed to get down to the basics of what they hoped to provide to the community, ensure that they didn't overlap, but also make sure there were opportunities to cross-promote, support, and make sure ‘culture’ is promoted as a team effort.

Their first opportunity to put the plan in action was early last fall when Aurora made its first foray into ‘Culture Days’, a national drive to celebrate all things which could be classified as ‘culture’.

‘Everyone was on board and we all came up with a different program,’ says Ms. Mandelcorn. ‘We made sure we had a wide variety of offerings for the community to make sure we weren't taking the same audience, collaborated so we would be able to maximize media in the community and it was really, really successful.’

The collaboration continued well beyond Culture Days 2012. Throughout this spring and summer, for instance, the Aurora Farmers' Market has regularly provided space for the Library for story time and other programs, which have been a hit with local youngsters, and other events to get these programs to as wide an audience as possible.

The collaboration will once again culminate in Culture Days 2013. Building on the success of last year's events, they came away with ideas of what to do, what not to do, and good ideas which needed a little bit of tweaking. This year builds upon that foundation.

The Aurora Public Library, for instance, will host a 'human library', featuring the chance to 'sign out' real people in the community with real stories to share for a time to answer all your 'burning questions' about their field of work or experience. This year's roster of 'books', include local author Gerry Fostady, award-winning musicians Bonnie Silver and Norbert Kraft, and local horticulturalist, poet and artist Dierdre Tomlinson.

The Aurora Historical Society will welcome Culture Days participants once again to Hillary House for a full day of activities as well as a chance to see ongoing exhibitions on health, recreation, and culinary arts.

The Culinary theme continues at the Aurora Farmers' Market with tastes from days gone by.

'We're all doing different activities and people are going to have a really fun day,' says Ms. Mandelcorn. 'Between 9 a.m. and 12 noon, the Aurora Farmers' Market is doing 'A Taste of Yesteryear'. All of the chefs are using locally sourced ingredients and they are going to be creating and preparing dishes on site. Food is culture and that is part of the human condition, but it is going to be fun and delicious.

'When people come to the library, children will have a story time, the Human Library ' and all of our books are local! People will be able to engage in something that is exciting, new and refreshing in a way that is 'Aurora.' I hope they will come away with a sense of fun and a sense of culture in their community, as well as a sense that culture is endemic with the human condition.' Culture Days gets underway at 9 a.m. on Saturday, September 28.

When Culture Days 2013 is another chapter for the history books, that won't be the end of the collaboration until 2014. Ms. Mandelcorn says the community can look forward to much more collaboration. The reason? Well, above the fact they are simply having fun doing it, they believe it is good for the community.

'We know that people are very sharing in nature,' she says, 'and all of us come away a little stronger than where we started.'

For Culture Days activities going on in Aurora and indeed across Canada, visit www.culturedays.ca.