

Day of celebration planned as Pan Am Torch nears Aurora



Attendees will receive hand-held flags to cheer torchbearers on, as displayed by Patty Thoma, Deputy Clerk for the Town of Aurora, who will carry the torch in Alliston this Friday.

By Brock Weir

Lambert Willson Park is the place to be on Thursday, June 25, as the Pan Am Torch arrives in Aurora.

The Industrial Parkway North park, near the Aurora Family Leisure Complex, will be the centre of a community celebration marking not only the upcoming games, which open in Toronto this July, but a commemoration of our local athletes past and present.

At press time, the Pan Am Torch is due to arrive in Aurora from Richmond Hill at Yonge Street and Bloomington Road, around 11 a.m. as it proceeds up Yonge Street, heading east on Wellington Street and north on Industrial Parkway for the Town's party, which runs from 11.30 a.m. to 4 p.m.

While details of the torch run are still being finalized, and what has been finalized changes continuously, there is an air of mystery of what to expect from the relay on the big day, but plans for the party at Lambert Willson Park are solidifying.

Unlike many Ontario municipalities who are marking the occasion with a party focusing on a Caribbean theme, Aurora is heading in a different direction, celebrating Canada's First Nations.

"I believe, fully, emotionally, their performance will be spectacular, and it will be a treat just to experience it," says Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora.

While the Aboriginal Presentation is a mainstay of many community events, this time its leaders are pulling out all the stops in gathering a much larger and much more diverse group of performers unlike what Aurora has experienced before.

"Most municipalities were going with a Caribbean entertainment theme and I wanted us to be different and offer variety," says Ms. Ware. "Then, after we booked them, pretty much all of York Region is going with the Aboriginal theme! But, I think this will be a very emotional ceremony. When the Vancouver [Olympic Torch Relay] came through it just went through. This time, the torch and the cauldron are actually being set up at Lambert Willson Park. This is the real deal."

Entertainment will be on tap at Lambert Willson through 2 p.m. before the party continues inside the Aurora Family Leisure Complex with drop-in badminton, badminton being one of the most popular Pan Am sports among participating nations, along with

Aboriginal arts and crafts through to
4 p.m.

The Aurora Cultural Centre is also hosting a component of the festivities launching the Legacy of Sport Exhibition commemorating local Pan Am athletes past and present. Many participating athletes will be on hand at the Park when the torch arrives, before proceeding to the exhibition opening, which is slated to run from 2 ? 5 p.m.

?There are so many elements of surprise it is fair game as to what will be the highlight of the day,? says Ms. Ware. ?It will be interesting to see how this rolls out. At every event there is always one huge community connection you don't anticipate. I think it will come from the Aboriginal presentation, but it might be seeing the torch bearers come in. You see them come in as normal, average people, and check in and then you see how they are when they come back after this experience. It has to be a cool experience.

?This Pan-Am Games is the largest sporting event in Canada's history to actually be done on Canadian soil. A lot of people assume the Vancouver or Calgary Olympics or Expo, but I believe this is double the size of athletes and volunteers. The stats are mind-blowing. I don't think people realise how exceptional it is and it really is just outside your own backdoor.?