

Doors Open 2013 breaks long-standing record



By Brock Weir

Some came to take in Aurora's hidden architectural jewels, while others came to soak in some history or simply have a day out in the sun walking from landmark to landmark.

Whatever their intention, people taking part in the eighth annual Doors Open Aurora set a new record, clocking in 3,869 individual site visits this year, beating the previous record of 3,331 set in 2010.

This year's event was brought back to August after a brief flirtation with holding Doors Open in July last year. In that endeavour, the Town recorded just over 2,500 individual site visits. Indeed, midway through the day, many of the 16 buildings on the tour were reporting significantly increased numbers over the previous year.

'There is something romantic about being able to go into places you aren't normally allowed to go,' said Stouffville resident Will L'Heureaux at Trinity Anglican Church, who was doing a circuit of the Doors Open site with fellow Stouffville resident Dan Schreim.

Both men are enthusiastic Doors Open goers, first taking in the festivals which are held throughout Ontario, when they lived in Toronto. At their stop at Trinity, they were intrigued by the contrast between the old chapel and the new chapel, and were eager to test out the fountain-like baptismal font which dominates the new worship space.

As they took the opportunity for Doors Open to introduce them to a neighbouring community they weren't necessarily all too familiar with, others such as Don and Christine Hutchinson took the opportunity to become more familiar with their new home.

'We just moved into Aurora a month ago from Brampton and this gives us a great opportunity to see some of the history of the Town and get into buildings we might not normally get into,' said Don.

Added Christine: 'Before we went on the tour, we were thinking about [taking in] the history of the Town, but now we're getting into the beauty of the buildings. The architecture is amazing.'

The Hutchinsons were on tour of the Cultural Centre. They were on the ground floor where visitors were able to try their hand on ringing the heavy school bell for a toonie, taking in some of the exhibits, embarking on a scavenger hunt throughout the Church Street School to learn more about the building, and get their hands dirty with some art projects in the basement.

Laura Schembri, Executive Director of the Aurora Cultural Centre, was downstairs encouraging visitors to leave their mark on a large 'paint by number' depiction of the Church Street landmark, based on a watercolour by artist Herbert Pryke.

As people 'including an unexpected tour bus of over 50 people for Doors Open' filed into the Centre for the variety of the activities, Ms. Schembri said there was marked contrast from last year.

'What's different is there are so many people from out of Town,' said Ms. Schembri. 'We have had new Aurorans come forward, we have had one woman who wants to sign up and volunteer who had just moved in a few months ago and, by and large, a lot of people are from outside of Town which is really great for Aurora.'

The Aurora Cultural Centre was not the only institution on show for the Tour. Over on Wells Street, the developing Wells Street Schoolhouse Lofts opened their doors to residents, including the Iorgovits family who, after nine years of living in Aurora, decided it was their turn to get out and take part in Doors Open.

On the next block at Victoria Hall, the Society of York Region Artists (SOYRA) put their talents on show with pieces celebrating local and international architecture.

At the nearby Aurora Public Library, Reccia Mandelcorn and Cindy Shaver had a number of activities on the go, from a hands-on look at historical artefacts lead by historian Jacqueline Stuart, to a 'speakers corner' encouraging people to leave video memories of their 'Aurora experience' for inclusion in a 150th anniversary Time Capsule.

But as places like the Aurora Cultural Centre and Aurora Public Library welcomed new and regular patrons, as well as people from out of town, proud owners of some of Aurora's historic homes also threw open their doors to the whole community eager to show off their homes which have become a labour of love, whether it is a restoration job or maintaining one's own family history.

'People say, 'does anyone actually live here?' and they seem to be a bit surprised when I say I do,' said John McIntyre who greeted visitors to his Horton Place home.

Filled to the brim with antiques dating back generations with his own family, some people have the impression that the home is a museum, but that is not the case.

'People have said, 'I've always wanted to come into this house but were never able to do' or they have passed it for years and wondered what it was like, so it has been nice to see those people today,' said Mr. McIntyre of the home's first inclusion on Doors Open Aurora.

'It's encouraging and gratifying [to see] people appreciate the house. I tend to see all the rough edges that need to be done and haven't been done, but when people come and say it is wonderful or marvellous, it gives me a different perspective.'