

Elvin the Elf getting ready for Santa's big night in Aurora

Santa's making his list, checking it twice, but getting him Aurora-ready are tasks that have been assigned to Mrs. Claus and head elf Elvin.

There's just over a week to go before Santa takes his sleigh down Yonge Street from Orchard Heights Boulevard in the north to Murray Drive.

The nighttime parade is a family-favourite and will get underway from 6 ? 8 p.m. with floats, marching bands, and much more.

Ahead of the big night, The Auroran connected with Elvin over Zoom in the North Pole to discuss all that's in store for Santa Under the Stars 2022.

The Auroran: This is the second year the parade has been back since COVID arrived. What plans are you hearing for the big Aurora parade up in the North Pole?

Elvin: I know in our overarching calendar here at the North Pole, that's a date to look forward to. We know getting him ready this year seems really normal for us, and it is also a delight because we aim to please Santa. If we have him ready for Aurora, we know he will be pleased with us. We have to make sure Santa's got confidence when he leaves the North Pole that we're on our targets, on our preparation for toys, building, as Santa goes through the list of naughty and nice that we're going to be able to hit the projections for this year while ensuring he has all the necessities and comforts he requires for his travels. A sleigh can be quite bumpy and not the most comfortable drive!

TA: What makes Aurora so special for Santa?

E: It is always a wonderful scene because the participants don't realize that Santa sees them when they're warming up in the staging area. Santa is really looking forward to more of those groups, more of the dance groups, more of the sports organizations coming out. We understand that we're up in the North Pole and it is quite cold here with our strong snow base, but from what we recall in Aurora it is still a little bit green. Hopefully the weather will be on our side, which will enable more groups to be able to participate in that capacity. Santa always looks forward to see the Optimist Club of Aurora's float as well as Marquee and Dynamic Dance studio, just to name a few, but it is also nice to see the active dance groups that don't have floats, such as Spectrum North Baton and, of course, the New Roots Garden Centre always makes a splash with what they're able to pull together.

TA: What makes Aurora so special for you?

E: Well, I hear the restaurants and eateries will be all decorated and ready to go to welcome everyone in the downtown and we strongly do, based on what Santa tells us, it is quite a beautiful downtown in Aurora. While you wait for the Jolly Man in Red himself to travel by, you should really take advantage of the shops being open late as well as the warm and cozy eateries along the route. The parade is more than just the magic you see within the roadway. There is so much magic between the curb and the storefronts. Hillary House always serves hot chocolate and what is better than a Hallmark moment of having hot chocolate at that National Historic Site? There will also be other locations such as Machell's Alley in that core of Yonge Street also providing hot chocolate. In addition to that, the shops also do their own unique welcome niceties to make the experience being out that evening all that more special.

TA: Maybe you might like to spend some extra time in Town! As far as the parade is concerned, are there any health, safety, or accessibility issues we should know about?

E: This year we will be able to focus on seeing even more children because although thousands arrived last year at the parade, we know with no restrictions it will only be bigger and busier this year! We have to make sure Santa's travels are as comfortable as

possible. With the list that Santa has already checked, we need to make sure they're updated. In Aurora, Santa really takes note and looks for the children that really abide by the road closure rules and not sitting on the road because the road has to be cleared between the curb eight feet out into the roadway for safety for emergency vehicles who have to access those routes. Santa really takes note of the children and families that stay curbside and don't set up camp on the road. Aurora will have an accessible viewing location on the east side of Yonge Street as well as on the west side of Yonge Street. Those will be on a first come first served basis. People can always reach out to the Town to request it and find out more details about it earlier because it is still limited space.

TA: Sounds like there's something for everyone! What's left on your to do list?

E: There is so much to do and even though the elves predominantly make our own toys, we're experiencing the COVID production shortages too because some toys do require manufactured pieces and some manufacturing has shortages, too. We're just the same as south of us, but overall it is really inventory management, production schedules, all while singing carols, eating our candy canes, and having a lot of cheer while doing our tasks.

TA: Thank you for your time, Elvin. We'll see you next Saturday. Do you have any parting words for our readers?

E: Yes! If you're not familiar with Aurora's parade, it's really one to come out for. If it is not your annual tradition already, consider making it. In order to make a tradition you first have to experience it. Come out. You will likely meet a new friend on the right side of you and on the left side of you as you hunker down for the receiving line when Santa rolls through. We hope that new residents will come and check it out, even those that maybe have done parades all their life and now they may not make it the top of their priority list, this is the perfect free outing. Come out, get some cheer, fill your heart with joy, and really start your holiday season.

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