

Farmers' Market opens Saturday morning



By Brock Weir

The 2013 Season of the Aurora Farmers' Market will open not with a bang, but rather with a flutter ? and that's just the way organizers want it.

The new market season opens Saturday at 8 a.m. at their customary Wells Street location, just outside the former Wells Street School (now Wells Street Schoolhouse Lofts) and extending into Town Park.

Festivities truly get underway around 10 a.m. with the grand opening, which will include a ceremonial release of monarch butterflies.

That will be a theme for the day with butterfly-themed crafts for the kids, special butterfly attractions, and entertainment provided by local high school bands. Saturday's concert will take place in the band shell in a new venture sponsored this week by Beck Financial as a pearl sponsor. Other companies, including Aurora Home Hardware, have also taken on sponsoring the band shell on select days throughout the season.

Organizers are spending this week making sure all the final touches are in place. This includes making final decisions on the applications of new vendors ? Market Chair Anna Kroeplin estimates up to 45 per cent new vendors this year?and touching base with returning vendors, making sure they have everything they need for opening day.

?We're capped at 45 vendors, which is because of our location,? says Ms. Kroeplin. ?It keeps it nice and intimate and community-minded.?

This sense of both community and intimacy is something Ms. Kroeplin says she feels is a real draw for new and returning vendors.

?Our reputation is really spreading out there,? she says. ?The feedback I am getting from new applicants is they have heard what a great environment it is among the mature trees in the park, and how safe they feel bringing their families, small children and dogs to be able to walk free. Our reputation has really gone above and beyond just Aurora.

?We have a lot of repeat customers that are very dedicated to the produce and the products that the vendors offer. It is the intimate location in being sort of old fashioned?and a very family-friendly environment.?

Beyond Saturday's Grand Opening, several special event days are scheduled throughout the summer. The first is the Strawberry Festival on June 22; an appreciation for Kerry's Place Autism Services and annual Art in the Park Festival on July 6; Seniors' Day ?

featuring entertainment from Aurora's active and talented senior population ? on August 3; Council's Community Corn Roast on August 24; the Apples N'Honey Fest on September 7; Culinary Days, which coincides with Culture Days on September 28; and their closing day on October 26.

Further partnerships this year include the Aurora Public Library, which plans on holding part of their Summer Reading Program reviews at the market, as well as the Optimist Club of Aurora which plans on holding a Bike Rodeo during a market day.

?We're hoping to do that in June,? says Ms. Kroeplin. ?The Wells Street neighbourhood would like to see some kind of bike parade to get the neighbours out and everyone communicating again and reconnecting. This is another great form of doing that.?

They also plan on working with the Town's Aurora 150 Committee to hold a special event day to mark Aurora's 150th anniversary.

?What we want to do is theme one of our days with a Pioneer Theme and have an on-site chef focus on pioneer culinary delights and perhaps even encourage people to dress up in old-fashioned clothing and bring back those core pioneer days when the market actually ran in Town Park.

?I think what we offer people is a place where they can just slow down, relax, buy incredibly delicious, nutritional food to encourage healthy living and be able to reconnect with their friends, family and neighbours. I know it isn't sexy, but this is what a lot of people thrive on.?

For more on the Aurora Farmers' Market, or to volunteer, visit theaurorafarmersmarket.com.