

## Foodiepalooza set to showcase local restaurants while helping food insecurity

World Food Day is October 16, and what better way to celebrate than trying out what York Region restaurants have to offer through Foodiepalooza?

Well, one way to do that is to ensure that each bite you take will help alleviate food insecurity that so many residents in this area continue to face.

October 16's Foodiepalooza is an initiative of the York Region Food Network (YRFN) and aims to bring together scores of restaurants for the occasion where 25 per cent of their sales that day will go directly to the myriad programs YRFN has to offer.

'We wanted an event that was food-related to celebrate World Food Day to raise money for all those families that are still struggling to put three meals a day on their table,' says YRFN's Joanne Witt. 'For us at the York Region Food Network, our numbers are still growing. You hear a lot that COVID is over and that kind of thing, but in the food insecurity space, our numbers are still really high. People are still struggling every day. There is a misconception that they can't afford food because they're not working, but we support lots and lots of families that have two parents working but everything is still so expensive that even with those two incomes, it's not enough.'

'We are still supporting and seeing really high numbers at our different programs and services every week. We receive no consistent money from the government, and at different levels we can apply for different grants and so on, but it's not consistent funding ? we fundraise 100 per cent of the money we need to be able to provide all these programs and services.'

And the more restaurants that get on board, the more support the YRFN can offer.

Since the York Region Food Network put out a Save The Date notice, several restaurants have come on board, the first being Aurora's Saffron at Wellington Street East and Mary Street.

'By doing Foodiepalooza, we want to really celebrate food, families, and all the wonderfulness that that brings on World Food Day and be able to work with restaurants throughout York Region that are interested in partnering with us, and we in turn can shine a light on them, who they are, what they serve, and how they're supporting the community,' says Witt. 'It's one of those situations where it is a win-win-win for everybody.'

'It comes down to being able to support your neighbour, support your friends, support your family. Most of us probably don't realize that there is somebody in our life that is struggling with food insecurity but may not be saying anything about it, because people feel shame, they feel embarrassed. We find especially men, because a lot of men have been taught that they need to support their family and work hard, and when they feel they're failing to do that, it's devastating. People aren't running around to everybody saying, 'I can't feed my kids' or whatever. They tend not to share. With the information that has been released from the Region of York with regard to the food insecurity within York Region, their information says that one in seven families in York Region is struggling with food insecurity and that's huge. That includes over 25,000 children. By participating in events like this, not only do you get to go out, you get to have a wonderful meal wherever you choose, you're helping us help those people that are still really struggling in the community and could be struggling quite silently.'

For more information on the upcoming Foodiepalooza initiative, or to participate as a restaurant or business, contact Joanne Witt at [joanne@yrfn.ca](mailto:joanne@yrfn.ca) or call 905-841-3101 x202.

**By Brock Weir**