

?Heartbeat of Aurora? returns to Town Park as Farmers? Market season approaches



Cathy Williams of Catharina's Kitchen is preparing for a busy baking week ahead as she fulfills orders for hundreds upon hundreds of freshly baked scones for May 6.

Williams, manager of the Aurora Farmers' Market, isn't sure how many of the orders were placed especially to celebrate the King's Coronation, but she will have plenty for sale as she welcomes customers to Town Park on the same day for the start of the Aurora Farmers' Market (AFM) season.

The AFM will open its new season at Town Park at 8 a.m. next Saturday, May 6, with a record-breaking 18 new vendors signing up for the spring and summer, alongside returning favourites, which will be stationed around the popular greenspace.

?We have 18 new vendors aside from all of our current vendors, which means we're spreading throughout the paths,? said Williams on Monday morning, surveying the landscape of Town Park. ?It's crazy how much space we need.?

While the AFM has always been a popular Saturday morning destination for residents of Aurora and beyond, it's taken on new resonance since the start of the global pandemic in 2020, which drove home the importance of shopping local.

?We've gotten even more popular over the last three years,? said Williams. ?We were a safe and welcoming place to come [at the height of the pandemic] ? and we're in a nice park instead of a parking lot and that makes all the difference.?

Next Saturday's opening will feature classic vinyl spun by record archivist and historian David Heard, and a host of family-friendly activities, all ahead of the Market's formal grand opening day on May 20, just in time for Victoria Day Weekend.

?We're all excited the Farmers' Market is coming back,? said Mayor Tom Mrakas. ?It means we've finished winter and we're entering into a beautiful time of year where the leaves are coming back, as well as all the vendors, and we get our delicious sandwiches on a Saturday morning; I know I am looking forward just as much as probably every resident to come out on Saturday to our beautiful Town Park and be able to visit all the great local vendors and all the great new additions I have heard are coming. I am excited and I know everyone else will be ? and I'm looking forward to getting my first peameal bacon sandwich of the year!?

In addition to the vendors and food, the AFM has proven to be something of a spring and summer ?town square?, where residents meet and can exchange ideas amongst themselves, municipal staff, and elected officials.

?It's a great way to know you have a spot in Town where everyone is coming together and we can engage with residents in our community, but it's [also a chance] for people to see the downtown, see the Armoury, to see the progress in the Town Square, and it allows them to come down here, which is ultimately what we're trying to do: the whole revitalization of Downtown. This includes the Town Park area and the Farmers' Market is a big component of that as well.?

Looking past the May 6 opening and the May 20 Grand Opening day, additional special event days include a Strawberry Festival on June 24, Customer Appreciation Day on July 22, the annual Corn Festival on August 19, Multicultural Day on September 23, observances for National Day for Truth & Reconciliation on September 30, a Harvest Festival on October 7, and, finally, a Halloween Parade on October 28.

As June is National Indigenous Peoples' Month, Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora, added there will be themed programming at the Market throughout the month.

?We're hopefully unveiling another Indigenous piece of public art,? said Ware, noting the installation of an Indigenous representation of a bumble bee at the park's east entrance. ?Traditional Anishinaabe grandmother Kim Wheatley will be here and will be doing a seedling planting with hands-on storytelling where you actually sing your seeds into the soil. It's a [chance to learn] how to grow your own food for sustainability using Indigenous agricultural practices.

?Then on June 3, 10, 17, and 24 there will be different Indigenous crafts which coincide with an educational learning arm with it on the Saturdays. Then, on Wednesday, June 21, a big twist is Concerts in the Park are going to start early with an Indigenous concert by Alderville Chief Dave Mowat, who is going to be bringing a trio.?

For more on the upcoming Market season, visit theaurorafarmersmarket.com.

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