

Hillary House Ball returns with Black & White theme



The Hillary House Ball, the biggest annual fundraiser for the Aurora Historical Society, is back this year and will once again pay tribute to the timeless elegance of monochrome.

The Black & White Ball will take over the Royal Venetian Mansion on Industrial Parkway South on Thursday, October 13, and will feature not only an elegant evening out to dance the night away to the music of the After Hours Big Band all for a good cause, but also a fashion show, virtual auction and much more.

"We are really excited we can finally get back to the in-person experience," says Patricia Wallace, President of the Aurora Historical Society (AHS). "We're very proud of what we did last year having to pivot to a virtual event and it was a great success [but] going back in person to that sort of elegance and fun is a combination that people really need right now."

The Black & White Ball, she stresses, is not a "stuffy" affair but all about having fun.

You can dress in any form of black and white to fit the theme, and it doesn't have to be black tie or evening gown, but if you want to go all out that can be fun, too.

A signature event for the AHS, this year's Black & White Ball will see some favourite elements returning for another year, along with new attractions.

The After Hours Big Band, recently re-formed after the global pandemic forced rehearsals onto the backburner, are back to provide live music.

Committee member Hoda Soliman is also in on the action with her clothing design business Sunshine Park.

"She will be putting together a show of women's fashions and we're hoping to have a little bit of menswear in there too," says Ms. Wallace. "Each of the outfits there modelled that night will be available for bidding, which is really kind of exciting. In addition, new this year will be our virtual silent auction. It uses an online platform and will go live one week before the event so people who are unable to come to the event can still support Hillary House and the Aurora Historical Society by bidding on items.

"The auction will close at the very end of the event and people at home can still be bidding against people there, so it is more inclusive. We have a lot of people at the event and a lot of people at home bidding on some really great stuff. The community has been fantastic in their donations, with more coming in."

Funds raised during this year's Ball will go towards the continual upkeep of Hillary House, the Yonge Street landmark which serves as Aurora's only National Historic Site.

Over the course of COVID-19, work was carried out to preserve the structural integrity of the house's veranda floor. The veranda is cited by Parks Canada as the premiere example of gothic architecture in all of Canada and attention has now turned to the veranda roof.

"We're always trying to stay on top of our restoration needs at Hillary House," says AHS curator Kathleen Vahey. "We're aware that a 166-year-old house is in constant need of repair and upkeep and there are several areas where we've identified the restoration work, working with different partners like the Ontario Heritage Trust, ERA Architects, and Parks Canada. We have several areas that we're planning to tackle within the next five to ten years and then, with that comes more fundraising."

Adds Ms. Wallace: "We had certain areas we identified and timeframes for restoring those and we have had expert consultation with a heritage architectural firm to help us identify not only what they are, the depth of the restoration required and the timeline when the eleventh hour is for that restoration. I can tell you that, when put together, the amount of money is shocking."

"We are looking at things that are short-term, within the next eight to 12 months, and then long-term meaning within the next two to five years. The fundraising for that has to start now. 8 ? 12 months is things like the verandah roof. The verandah on its own is known as the gold standard of gothic revival architecture in a verandah anywhere in Canada and that is so important. Aurora should be so proud to have that in the community."

The Aurora Historical Society will host the Hillary House Black & White Ball at the Royal Venetian Mansion on Thursday, October 13 from 6 ? 10 p.m. Tickets are on sale now at \$168 per person (\$157 for AHS members) or \$1,575 for a table of 10. For more information, including purchasing options, visit aurorahs.com.

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