

INSIDE AURORA: Street Fest 2017

By Scott Johnston

Once again thank you and well done to the Aurora Chamber of Commerce and their many partners for another terrific Street Festival.

Sadly, the weather was kind of threatening early on with rain and thunder, which likely brought down the crowds, but there were still a fair number around midday when we were there.

In previous years, attendance has usually been pegged at about 40,000 to 50,000 people, no matter what the weather. Recently, the number has been a more realistic ?in the tens of thousands?.

That's still a lot of people.

The attendees were not the only ones that were a little lighter this year. Of the usual 500 plus vendors, there were obviously some who bailed at the last minute, based on the gaps that appeared in the usual wall of booths that traditionally line each side of the road. Despite a few less booths, as always there was still a lot to see and do.

Not surprisingly, a number of groups were promoting Canada 150 in one form or another, which was nice to see with that milestone less than a month away. Unfortunately, but inevitably, some of them took this as an opportunity for a little self promotion.

One thing you didn't see was any animals. It seemed strange that the parking lot that usually hosts the petting zoo sat unused.

You may remember, last year there was concern about the wellbeing of the animals being housed there on that extremely hot day, so 2017 was an animal-free Street Festival.

The exception to this was, of course, dogs.

It seemed there was every variety of canine wandering up and down Yonge Street.

There was an equally large number of booths dedicated to them offering food, treats, pet sitting, clothing, photography, and more. If you were more of a bird or hamster person, you were out of luck.

In all the years I've attended the Street Fest, there's always been at least one group giving away free trees, and that was happening again this year.

As always, the species of choice was the spruce.

Conifers are easy to raise in large numbers and look showy as seedlings, certainly compared to deciduous trees, which are pretty much just twigs when they're small. However, it would be nice if other species started being given away, lest Aurora become a monoculture of spruces.

The product that seemed to be the top selling item this year, not counting fudge, which always has about the highest percentage of vendors, was the fidget spinner.

These spinners are the latest fad, and consist of a small propeller-type device with a bearing that allows it to be spun quickly in one's hand. Whether these are stress relievers for adults, or toys for kids, they certainly seem to represent a large market. At least for now. Something else you're bound to see at the Street Fest is a neighbour, colleague or friend, and for us, this year was no exception.

I suppose if you waded through thousands of local people, you'd need to be a hermit not to run into someone you know.

Perhaps the best thing about this annual event is the variety.

There are lots of products and services for sale, but there is also food, music, buskers, community groups, arts and crafts.

And there is always something new. This year, in partnership with Activate Aurora, they introduced Open Streets, closing a few local roads in the cultural district to cars and encouraging pedestrian and cycling traffic.

That pretty much sums up why the Street Fest is so successful; in one spot it offers old favourites, new experiences, and a chance to get to know your community a little better.

See you there next year.

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