

Library launches next-gen book mobile



By Brock Weir

Once upon a time, not so long ago, there was a motorized library on four wheels.

The 'book mobile' used to visit various locations around town, engine running, while potential library patrons perused new books or heard a story or two.

The book mobile in Aurora is now due a revival – but this time, the book mobile is an innovative, eco-friendly alternative.

The Aurora Public Library's new Book Bike was launched Monday.

A one-of-a-kind custom made cargo bike is now on the road and set to make a splash at various upcoming Aurora events and locations. Chances are, if you're in Town Park over the next few days, you'll see the Book Bike approach, but stick around and get familiar with it because it's anyone's guess what will be in, come out, or take place on the bike itself.

'It folds out into a table so we can go out into parks and do pop-up story times; we can also do puppet shows, visit seniors' homes, and we've got mobile technology on board so we can register people in real time and, eventually, even sign out materials,' says Reccia Mandelcorn, Manager of Community Collaboration for the Aurora Public Library (APL). 'It is an ecological, people-friendly impromptu library wherever you're at and we think we're going to have fun with it.'

Taking books out in book mobiles has been a long-standing tradition, but they wanted to do something a little bit outside the norm, she explains. Similar book bikes are popular in cities such as Winnipeg, but have seen a particular resurgence in many locations around the United States.

During a recent conference, APL staff members were able to kick the tires, so to speak, on a book bike built by the Ottawa Public Library and marvelled at the outreach and fun they were having with it.

'We just decided out of that presentation that we had to get one for the Aurora Public Library so the search for a book bike began,' says Ms. Mandelcorn.

That search took them far and wide, eventually leading them to a referral in Copenhagen where cargo bikes have become a way of life for young urban families, whether they are carting around groceries or carting around their children!

APL was connected with a cabinet maker who showed them various designs and how they could be adapted for their particular use and now the finished product is ready to be enjoyed – as long as APL staffers have the pedal power.

'Some of our staff are some very serious bikers, not Sunday bikers like myself, but even one who has ridden a bike from Aurora to Ottawa and back,' says Ms. Mandelcorn. 'We have real power there! I have a feeling that our children's librarian is just ready to go over to Wells Street and Town Park very, very soon. We would like to be able to, for example, go out to businesses and be able to sign up people. We're hoping to go along Yonge Street and see if we can get some of the local merchants to sign up for cards and teach them about how to register for online free courses, which is a real plus for any kind of small business to be able to promote learning for its employees, and we would also like to be able to go to some of the Town festivals.'

'We always go out with a table, chairs and a tent, but this would just be more impromptu and more fun. When we started thinking about programming, we decided to open it up to our staff and say, 'If you've got a program and you've got an audience and you

think you can have fun with this ? and you've got a good helmet and know how to ride ? just let us know and the bike is yours.?
At the end of the day, the Library hopes it will show people that APL is a ?library that looks beyond the box? and sees the fun and innovation that can be had. A library is more than just a facility, they say; ?a lovely facility? sure, but they want to be able to be out in the town and bring the library to users.