

## Lions Club gearing up to go to the dogs ahead of weekend fundraising walk



The Aurora Lions Club is getting ready to lace up this weekend and help Canadians living with vision loss, epilepsy, autism and more get a helping hand as they host the annual Walk for Dog Guides.

The Pet Valu Walk for Dog Guides, hosted by the Aurora Lions, will take place at Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park and the Aurora Community Arboretum this Sunday, May 31.

A cause very close to the hearts of Lions across the country, the Aurora club is hard at work to make this walk one to remember and bring out more than 100 participants to walk for those who need a four-legged guide.

Each dog guide, whether they are trained to help the visually impaired, those living with epilepsy, and more, can cost upwards of \$35,000 to train ? and, in this walk, every step counts.

The Walk for Dog Guides is now in its 41st year.

Initially founded to support the Canine Vision Canada program, it's a cause that grown to encompass dog guides trained to respond to vision and hearing challenges, seizure response, diabetes alert, autism assistance, and more.

This year's Walk will take place Sunday with registration beginning at Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park at 10 a.m., before participants set out for the 2km walk in the nearby Arboretum.

Event chair Trudy Stunden says she and the Committee have been hard at work to make this event bigger than ever, with a scavenger hunt and other activations taking place throughout and along the Arboretum route, with further fun planned back at the Park after the event.

Fire and Police Services, for instance, will be at the Park to offer some interactive experiences, and vendors will be on hand offering everything from custom leashes, to dog sitting and grooming services, behavioural training, and even environmentally friendly options for disposing of dog poop.

Some of the participating vendors were on hand at last year's event and Stunden says they were so impressed with what they saw, and what the Lions were doing, that they asked to ?come on board the Committee and help expand the walk.?

?We used to do the walk at Shepherd's Bush for many, many years, and it's not that very good for accessibility with the Walk anymore, so we came up with the idea of Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park with the Walk actually in the Arboretum,? says Stunden. ?We start off at the park and we have a full schedule planned. Then, at 11, we walk across the Arboretum for the 2km walk, and back to the park for pizza, drinks, and prizes. It's a lovely walk and everybody who walks seems to enjoy it ? and we're really trying

to expand it as a family event.?

In addition to the vendors, participants will have a chance to meet two such guide dogs ? and their humans ? who will be able to drive home how important each step is in assisting Canadians who need canine care.

This importance is not lost on Stunden who says when she first became involved in the walk, she was so interested in the program she visited their training facility in Oakville.

?I was totally amazed,? she shares. ?I met with a woman who had a child [on the autism spectrum] and she told me he didn't sleep at night, and when they line up at the grocery store he flights. They got the service dog and it changed their life. It sleeps with him all night long. When they go to the grocery store, they tether the dog to the child and when he goes to flight, the dog will lay down and the child follows the dog's responses, which calms him down. It was amazing.

?I met another woman there who had her sixth foster dog [before it goes back for training]. I said I don't think I could return a dog after the year and she said, ?I cried with my first one, but then, when you come and get invited back to see the dog matched with their person and you see what the dog is going to do for them, I was in and I'm on my sixth foster.' They match it, the recipients come to the facility for three to six weeks and work with the dog that is picked for them to make sure it's a match ? and from that alone I wanted to become involved.?

To become involved yourself, take part in Sunday's walk, or sponsor a registered participant, visit [www.walkfordogguides.com/fundraiser/AuroraONWalkforDogGuides](http://www.walkfordogguides.com/fundraiser/AuroraONWalkforDogGuides).

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