

Murder Mystery aims to be fun way to fight food insecurity, support youth

The Orient Express.

The Rue Morgue.

Manderley.

All scenes of notable fictional murders ? and now Aurora Town Square is set to join this esteemed list as Marquee Theatrical Productions and the York Region Food Network team up to transport ticket-holders to Transylvania where a murder is set to take place this October ? but rest assured it's all for a good cause.

On October 17, Marquee Theatrical Productions and the York Region Food Network will join forces for ?A Halloween Murder Mystery,? a dinner theatre fundraiser supporting both organizations' work in support of youth arts and in combatting food insecurity within the local community.

The interactive evening, which is set to unfold in Aurora Town Square's Performing Arts Hall, will showcase a murder-mystery staged by Marquee with a three-course dinner provided by Seasons, the York Region Food Network's (YRFN) fundraising catering service featuring locally-sourced delicacies prepared by Chef Maxine Knight.

The idea to host a murder mystery fundraiser came following a similar murder mystery event staged by Marquee benefiting the Aurora Seniors' Association.

Joanne Witt of the YRFN was in attendance at that affair and knew a similar collaboration between her group and Marquee could pay dividends not only for each organization, but the community as a whole ? and provide a bit of fun at the same time.

?The event was on a Saturday night and I was in Sheryl's office Tuesday morning,? says Witt, recalling her first meeting with Marquee founder Sheryl Thomas to brainstorm ideas. ?Both of us are such great collaborators; it's always fun to do stuff like this with other people. It's going to raise awareness for both of our organizations.?

Once they had landed on an initial concept, Thomas sourced the script and brought the acting ensemble together. She's mum on most of the plot, but teases that it's set in a Transylvania hotel during the spookiest time of year.

?Theatre is a magical, magical art,? says Thomas on why fundraising ? and awareness-building ? events like these are important to an organization like Marquee. ?A lot of people think, ?Oh, you just teach acting and a little bit of singing and dancing and stuff over there,? but people don't really understand that that's just the vehicle that we use to teach youth in the community ? youth from four to 18 ? life skills. From the process of putting on a musical, it teaches them so many life things like time management, working as a team, responsibility ? and ultimately it all helps to build their confidence and communication.

?Communication is a huge piece. We have had many a kid that comes here, perhaps with a learning disability or autism, on the spectrum, whatever it might be. Sometimes they've been non-verbal. By the end, they're actually saying a few words and they're okay doing it on a stage. That's massive. Every kid's got their own journey, and so even sometimes just that little inch is massive to that family, or that child's life. Theatre just changes lives, but not only does it do it for the kids, we do adult productions as well and it enriches the entire community.?

Witt adds that while they're eager for this event to showcase Chef Maxine's creations, every dollar raised will help make a real difference in food security challenges throughout York Region.

?We're an organization that receives no consistent government funding,? says Witt. ?We fundraise for 100% of our budget. We're

now over \$1 million for our budget. When I started at this organization three years ago, our budget was \$500,000. We've more than doubled what's going on in the organization, and that's because one in five families in York Region is struggling with food insecurity. That's huge, and that includes over 30,000 children in that.

?This is an opportunity to promote the programs and services that we offer just to make sure that everybody knows what we're doing so that if they are struggling, they can come to us and we can help them. If they know somebody who's struggling, they can come. We always have had great partnerships with the food banks because we service the same people, but the food banks do their thing and people struggling with food insecurity need more than they can give. That's where an organization like ours comes in and has all of these other programs and services for that same group of individuals.?

Tickets for A Halloween Murder Mystery are on sale now at marqueetp.com. In addition to ticket sales, both Marquee and YRFN are seeking sponsors and donations to their silent auction.

Those interested in helping can reach out via the same link.

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