

New Beginnings Pow Wow returns to Aurora on Saturday

By Brock Weir

New Beginnings is set to become a storied tradition as Aurora prepares to welcome the third annual New Beginnings Pow Wow this Saturday, June 1, at 12 noon.

New Beginnings is a celebration and showcase of Indigenous food, dance and culture that will run from 12 noon until 9 p.m. with this year's theme being Honouring Our Elders.

Pow Wows promote cultural pride in an inclusive setting and play an important role in many Indigenous peoples' lives, according to the Town, and they serve as a forum to share indigenous heritage with surrounding communities.

Events will begin at Lambert Willson Park, located just behind the Aurora Family Leisure Complex, with a Grand Entry at noon. The grand entry is a ceremonial feature of the event, which will include dignitaries, including participating chiefs, followed by dancers and other performers.

Following the Grand Entry, festivities will run from 1 ? 5 p.m., featuring a variety of dances grouped according to their cultural genres.

The Feast will take place between 5 and 7 p.m.

?This is where all the dancers, all the participants, all those involved have a reflective time,? explains Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora. ?They eat, they recharge their energies and, in my non-Indigenous terms, it's like a time out: they get rested, ready to go, and start more dancing.?

In between, the Town will host make-and-take Indigenous crafts, while Indigenous vendors will be on hand throughout the afternoon and evening selling artwork, cards, jewellery and other traditional crafts.

Also going on throughout the Pow Wow is a sacred fire.

?It is a small fire, but there are specific protocols to go with it,? says Ms. Ware. ?The purpose is to provide time for a person to reflect and in the Indigenous culture, they would call upon supports from groups they rely on. It's neat being a non-Indigenous person to participate in walking around the circle of the sacred fire. I don't know what it is, but from personal experience, I feel there is something you do feel participating in that element.

?When you walk around the sacred fire, it is a time to

reflect just on your own energy at that time, your own troubles, your own thoughts; in our day and age now, even today, are we setting aside time to actually have time for personal reflection and self care? We're such a busy culture that some of these elements I don't think we pay enough attention to. From that perspective, I think we have a lot to learn from this culture, as we do many, many other cultures. There is a lot they can teach us that we would benefit from.?

But as much as learning will take place on site, if you are planning to attend, there are a few pieces of protocol and tradition you should be aware of. This is an event unlike many others hosted by the Town of Aurora. Typically you can take photos of just about anything at a Town event, but here it is a traditional requirement to ask permissions of the dancers before taking their photo dressed in their regalia. It is up to the dancer to choose whether or not it is appropriate at the time.

This is also one of the few events where dogs, with the exception of service animals, are not allowed due to the traditional customs of the Pow Wow.

?By more people attending it, more people getting involved, it strengthens the experience as well as our understanding in terms of the important roles for a variety of cultural practices that play within many Indigenous lives,? says Ms. Ware. ?No matter how busy everyone is this weekend with the Aurora Chamber Street Festival on Sunday and so much going on, commit to yourself to spend some time checking out the Pow Wow. It only happens once a year and it is something I really encourage you to experience because it is something very special and very different.?

The New Beginnings Pow Wow's host drum is Bluestone, with Head Male Dancer and Grass Dance Special by Farley Eaglespeaker, and Head Female Dancer Pam Plain. The White Pine Dancers also welcome all nations to participate as a vendor or dancer. If you are interested in participating contact Rod Nettagog at bluestonecloud@hotmail.com.

For more information on the event, visit aurora.ca/powwow or call the 905-726-4762.