

Niagara College hopes to be in Armoury by October



By Brock Weir

They were hoping to be settled into the historic Aurora Armoury by the start of the 2019-2020 school year, but Niagara College's Canadian Food & Wine Institute is now hoping to have things up and running next month.

The Canadian Food & Wine Institute nevertheless aims to unveil their full roster of classes, courses and other associated programs that will take place inside the historic building on their website next week. Meanwhile, work continues within the former home of the Queen's York Rangers, according to Craig Youdale, Dean of the Canadian Food & Wine Institute (CFWI).

“Right now, we are in the final stages of installing equipment and some of the finishing touches, including the construction of the patio, but we’re in the home stretch,” says Mr. Youdale.

The fully renovated Armoury was originally supposed to be complete in June, but has been subject to a sliding scale in the intervening months. At the last Council meeting in July, renovations were anticipated to be complete by mid-August with the CFWI moving in at the end of that month. But, construction continues and October is now being eyed, says Mr. Youdale.

In the meantime, the CFWI has already filled two new permanent positions – an Operations & Chef Manager and an Event Administrator – who have been on the job for about three weeks, put up in space “thanks to the Town of Aurora until the building is complete,” says Mr. Youdale.

“They are already starting to plan the building

operations and to get things rolling as soon as we get in there," he says. "We don't want to plan anything and not have everything ready, but we do have some plans to have things going almost right away, so definitely at some point in October, right through to the fall and winter. We will have classes and events planned in the space pretty much every weekend and during the week as well."

Some of the upcoming plans, he says, include Christmas- and Holiday-themed classes in the lead up to the winter on how to bake everything from breads to Christmas cookies, and courses on how to plan the perfect Christmas dinner. As an added attraction, programs will be offered which will allow patrons to order a full Christmas dinner, prepared by CFWI staff, to take home to enjoy during the festive season.

On the beverage side of the Canadian Food & Wine Institute Programming, upcoming classes will include courses on pairing food and wine, tasting classes for wine, beer and cider, and much more.

"Niagara College is very excited," says Mr. Youdale on becoming the first permanent post-secondary presence in Aurora. "This is new ground for us, too. It is a new opportunity, it is a new style of bringing education to a Region and a Town. This is something that is really different and I know our staff is really excited."

Since Aurora struck a lease agreement with Niagara College in the last term of Council, representatives from the CFWI have been a steady presence in community events, including the Aurora Farmers' Market and the now-annual Christmas Markets. These and other events have allowed Niagara College to give the public a flavour of what's to come, as well as offered educators to get an idea of what the community would like to see from the institution.

"We have seen some fantastic input and engagement from the Town and the surrounding region," says Mr. Youdale. "Businesses, private individuals, groups and organizations have all been in contact with us constantly since the project was announced about being able to partner with us, connect with us, how to use the space, and what opportunities they have when the space is opened. It has been really positive and we have been able to have great relationships with [the business community], with the Chamber of Commerce, the Historical Society, and different community outreach groups.

"There have been a variety of groups that are looking to connect with us and not only use that space, but partner on events and other activities that happen in the Town. We want to not just be a singular operation in the Town, but we want to be able to be a part of what is happening in the Town as well."

The biggest challenge, he adds, is "so many people are excited about the space" that it is a challenge to accommodate everyone "but they're trying." "The space is only so big and there are only so many square feet, so hopefully we will be able to have enough variety so that everyone gets a chance to be there."

Looking to what has already been completed, Mr. Youdale says he thinks people will be taken with the renovations as soon as they walk through the Armoury's doors. The integration of the building's history, such as the former drill shed's original beamed ceilings, with modern amenities, like the floor to ceiling roll-up glass doors that will facilitate a seamless connection between the Armoury building and Town Park will be a unique and interactive landmark in Aurora, he says.

The main event space is the centre point of the building and that is going to be a really impressive space for people, he says. You will walk into the building and see right up to the 40 foot beamed roof of the original barn with all the original timbers and the original ceilings still in place, but integrated into that is a full culinary theatre with video display and high tech cameras with cooking equipment almost like your own tv show right in the middle of the event space. Another [exciting space] is the teaching kitchen, which is on one side of the building that faces the entire park. With the glass floor to ceiling, not only will you be able to take in and see the entire park when you're working right in the kitchen and learning, but people in the park will be able to look inside and see classes taking place.

We are as excited to get started as the community is to get in there and use the space. I think that the community will find that there is going to be something for everyone and that is what our goal was from the beginning, from a simple class on how to bake breads, to a VIP dinner or wedding or social event. There will be something for everyone in the space, an opportunity to use the space, and that was a goal to the design to bring a wide variety of opportunity.

For more information on Niagara College's Canadian Food & Wine Institute, as well as the full roster of classes and courses when it goes live the week of September 9