

Ontario wines to be uncorked for first time at Aurora Farmers' Market

By Brock Weir

For many Aurorans, the Aurora Farmers' Market is the first destination to get a good selection of locally grown vegetables and fruit.

Those looking for the fruit of the vine, however, have had to settle for the humble green or red table grapes. Or, maybe a basket of tomatoes if you are so inclined.

But that was last year. The 2014 Market Season, which opens next Saturday, May 3, is going into a brave new world, hosting local wineries to share their vintages with market goers.

The Ontario Government recently relaxed rules on vineyards and wineries participating in local farmers markets, and these businesses, and indeed the Aurora Farmers' Market, have been quick to seize the new opportunity right from the outset.

‘It is so exciting and we have already had four really amazing wineries get in touch with us, including Peller Estates from Niagara-on-the-Lake,’ says Anna Kroepelin, Chair of the Aurora Farmers Market. ‘We would love to have a winery that is more local, but we have found the wineries that got in touch with us are the ones from Niagara. They will be an amazing complement to have them beside a cheese person and grapes!’

Although wineries will not be on hand for every market day this season, they will be there for next weekend's 2014 Opening, which gets underway on Wells Street beginning at 8 a.m.

The inaugural day will be ‘buzzing’ with special demonstrations and programs relating to bees, as well as entertainment by Scottish dance teams. The wineries will also be there to give the over-18s a flavour of things to come.

‘Premier Wynne said there would be responsible sampling, so we will have to be very responsible,’ says Ms. Kroepelin.

In addition to the winery options, the Aurora Farmers' Market will boast many new vendors from chefs offering roti and Mexican cuisine to, on the extreme other side of the coin, Cathy's Crawly Composters, which will give people a hands-on feel (no, really!) of what they can do with their food waste.

‘She will be coming on special event days and it will be good because we have a lot of people who are interested in growing in their own gardens vegetables and herbs, and the compost that worms can produce, the worm poop, is incredibly easy to work with, it doesn't smell, and it is also very good for the environment,’ says Ms. Kroepelin.

These special event days scattered throughout the calendar total nine this year. Following the May 3 Grand Opening, the second Special Event day will be the annual Strawberry Fest on June 21.

The Strawberry Festival will include the second-annual butterfly release, which was a resounding success last year, necessitating pre-registering for the butterflies this year.

July 5 will signal Art in the Park, coupled with the annual Kerry's Place Appreciation Day, which promises to have a few surprises this year to coincide with Kerry's Place Autism Service's 40th anniversary this year. Seniors' Day will be marked on August 2, followed by the Community Corn Roast on August 23, which will also have a new addition this year.

‘We are turning it into a ‘family day’ offering games for the kids, and we are also going to have a ‘Moms to Moms Swap and Sale’ offering moms the chance to set up a table and get rid of old clothes, games, toys and other things and just swap them with other moms. We're also going to have a blessing of the animals that day with Rev. Tracy Cox.’

The ideal animals to be blessed are those which might be of the canine and feline variety, or perhaps a bird, turtle, or a fish safely in its bowl. Aurora's Parks Department might frown on any livestock roaming Town Park, Ms. Kroeplin cautions!

Additional Special Event days include the Apples N' Honey Fest on September 6, Culinary Day on September 27, Pumpkin Fest (complete with pumpkin bowling) on October 4, and a Customer Appreciation Day on the last day of the Market on October 11.

? We just want the market to be as safe as possible, for people to have a great time, and just be a community gathering place for people to reconnect with each other, buy local farm produce, and stay healthy,? says Ms. Kroeplin.