

?Reborn? museum charts three-year vision and growth plan

By Brock Weir

Aurora's Museum and Archives may have only been officially ?reborn? little more than a month ago, but the fledgling new cultural institution is already finding its feet with a three-year vision for the future.

And, it's a grand vision that aims to break out of the confines of the Aurora Room, an exhibition space in the southeast corner of the second floor of the Church Street School and potentially branch out into the wider community.

It is a vision that was given new life this month by Shawna White, the curator of the museum, who was appointed to the position last winter.

In her pitch to Council, Ms. White charted a vision that would include an additional 100 square feet of space next year in addition to their currently designated space of 2,672 square feet, and expanding by a further 3,050 square feet in 2017.

Currently staffed by one full-time position ? Ms. White ? and a six-hour-per-week part-time position, the vision includes a staff complement that grows in step with their expansion plans: an additional full-time and part-time addition in both 2016 and 2017.

?The rebirth of the Aurora Museum and Archives is an exciting time for culture and heritage within the Town,? said Ms. White, noting the transfer of the Aurora Collection, an inventory of thousands of items connected with Aurora's heritage previously owned and curated by the Aurora Historical Society, to the Town of Aurora was a watershed moment for local culture. ?It has provided tremendous opportunity to build a foundation for a dynamic and relevant institution in which to record, collect, preserve, interpret and exhibit our shared history.?

History, however, is not static and Ms. White wants to capture ?history as it happens.? To do so, she has developed a plan focusing on three key areas: access, collections management, and conservation and outreach.

?The first key area of the plan is access with the goal to increase access to the collection,? she said. ?This can be achieved through exhibitions, an online presence, research opportunities, and by looking beyond our walls.?

Once the existing Legacy of Sport exhibition is mothballed next March, the Museum hopes to be able to roll out three exhibitions per year by 2017 in the Aurora Room, and in other places around the municipality by 2018.

?By the spring of 2016, a three to five year exhibition plan will be in place,? she said. ?An online presence is an important strategy as more people have the potential to be reached than would otherwise just come through the door. The museum also needs to connect with the youth through internship, co-op placements and volunteer opportunities. We want to connect with local residents in a deeper, more meaningful way.

?I would like to form a Friends of the Aurora collection volunteer organization to assist with fundraising the collection activities. I am particularly interested in working with individuals who may have ideas for an exhibition and may want to curate their own show. I am looking forward to meeting with individuals with knowledge and stories to share. My ultimate goal is to capture history as it happens and have that reflected in some way with the Aurora Collection.?

There are several hurdles that need to be cleared before that can happen, she noted. In addition to needing more staff and financial resources, it is paramount to have ?unimpeded? access to the archives and research library, a schedule that is often contingent on schedules worked out with the Aurora Cultural Centre. Additional space will go towards making the Aurora Museum and Archives compliant with provincial standards. Right now, they have worked out one specific day where they have full access to the research library.

?To be compliant, collection and storage areas must be dedicated sole use spaces with access restricted to the curator or designate,? said Ms. White. ?The basement storage area [currently in use at the Church Street School] cannot be shared with the Cultural Centre as it is now. Policies and procedures need to be written, storage and display environments need to be stable. The collection needs to be properly documented, staff need to be properly trained, budgets for staff training and development need to be allocated annually and an active volunteer program must be in place.?

In addition to storage facilities at the Church Street School, the Aurora Museum and Archives has since been allocated storage space at the old Aurora Armoury and, by next year, with proper resources and the plan in place, no artefacts will remain stored directly on the school's basement floor.

?The final strategy in collection management is to assess the preventative and remedial conservation needs of the collection and to take appropriate action. Basic archival supplies have been purchased, including an assortment of archival boxes and containers. The storage areas are being carefully assessed at the moment and objects at risk are being rehoused in appropriate storage containers shelf by shelf.?