

Ring in the New Year with some indoor, outdoor fun on Family First Night

Celebrate the end of 2021 and the dawn of 2022 at Aurora's Family First Night.

Activities to ring in the new year include free public swims and skates at the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex throughout the morning and afternoon (pre-registration is required) before the outdoor fun begins at Town Park, running from 6 ? 9 p.m.

Given new and evolving rules handed down by the Province to fight the Omicron variant, registration will be required for the outdoor park activities as well, which include a wide array of distanced, interactive fun as well as live entertainment.

?This will be a hybrid event offering in-person experiences, virtual experiences and interactive virtual experiences, as well as distanced activities,? says Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora, who has been working with her team to ensure the plans are flexible and will be able to accommodate any new health rules that are handed down before New Year's Eve.?

?For the in-person activities, we're going to offer three free swims and three free skates,? she continues, noting pre-registration for these programs opens on December 21 through the Town's e-Play system. ?In the evening is our finale event for 2021 with North Fire Circus and Dr. Draw. It will be a full, live, choreographed performance involving an orchestra, fire dancing, and high-end busker-type performances ? a curated, programmed and highly-dynamic.?

The fire dancing this year will be a new form for Town programming and has to be seen to be believed.

?Last year, we couldn't have an in-person celebration for Family First Night and although we're still working through the implications of COVID, by having an in-person celebration it gives us a tiny ounce of the normalcy to come,? says Ms. Ware. ?As well, I think the park with the trees and the Town's letters is a perfect setting to really provide not only dynamic entertainment with bonfires and lights, which gives families time for reflection together in an outdoor setting.?

This will be the first time Family First Night will be held outdoors. In a typical year, activities are usually programmed at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex or the Stronach Aurora Recreation Centre. It will be a new experience for the community and organizers alike ? but one which promises to be dynamic.

For those unable to register or uncomfortable attending an in-person event, there are plenty of virtual activities to make ringing in the New Year as special as it would be without a pandemic to contend with.

?For those who choose not to attend, I think ordering in some takeout and sitting at home being mesmerized by what is done live will be a really cool experience,? says Ms. Ware. ?For the virtual elements, we will have lots of activities on our webpage and we will be doing a year-in-review looking at our events through 2021, which will be a nice trip down memory lane. People might not realize in a typical events year, we usually produce an average of 28 in-person programming days and this year we will have hit Day 50. We want to show all the experiences from Arctic Adventure, to Canada Day, to drive-in movies, Indigenous storytelling, Truth & Reconciliation, Ribfest, Saturday Night Fever, Colours of Fall, the Stanley Cup, Multicultural Festival, parades, the Christmas Market, the Haunted Greenhouse ? it was a very robust year!

?Other virtual events will involve paint nights that you can do at home with artist Judy Sherman. We will have trivia game nights and although people can make their own game night at home, we're doing the curating for you with Jeopardy, card bingo, Name That Tune? the work is done for you! Distanced activities will include another community-wide Goose Chase to keep families active doing a variety of different activities, competing for points and 2022 gift baskets. We are also launching some geocaches for those into taking an adventure around the community with their family.

?With what the Aurora community has been able to achieve through their diligence, I think having just the in-person event day is a huge accomplishment and I think if we can do this, considering how we started this year off? I think 2022 will be an even more

robust events year with the community and for the community. Hopefully, once we get through this new current challenge with COVID, hopefully we will be able to officially turn the page moving into 2022.?

But a lot can happen in the meantime.

For the most up-to-date information on Family First Night, including registration for the Town Park events, the public swims, skates, and more, keep checking aurora.ca/familyfirst.

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter