

Rotary awaits details on Ontario's 'BYOB' proposal

If you've enjoyed beer at a public event in Aurora, chances are it was served up by the local Rotary Club at beer gardens that raise money for community.

Now, as the Province of Ontario puts forward new rules that could see 'Bring Your Own' alcoholic beverages allowed at select outdoor public events as early as April 30, they're awaiting answers on what this could mean for their operations and the proceeds they re-invest in the community.

Last month, the Provincial government announced it was expanding 'bring your own' permits for municipally-designated cultural or community outdoor public events.

The policy could see 'BYOB' permits at Farmers' Markets, movie screenings, art exhibits and neighbourhood festivals.

The move, according to the Province, would support local events, small businesses and tourism.

'Starting this spring, Ontario is giving communities more flexibility to safely and responsibly enjoy cultural and outdoor events,' said Ontario Attorney General Doug Downey. 'The 'bring your own' event permits will help save attendees money, lower overhead costs for event organizers and contribute to local economies.'

Added Peter Bethlenfalvy, Ontario's Minister of Finance: 'Our government is always working to find new ways to empower local communities, boost economic activity, and increase tourism. By giving Ontario municipalities the choice to make use of this new initiative, our government is directly contributing to their economic wellbeing while ensuring adults can continue to safely and responsibly enjoy their favourite products.'

The expansion of the BYOB policy will allow municipalities to pass bylaws authorizing the use of alcohol in public, if one doesn't already exist, and 'establish a local process that would determine whether an event qualifies as community or cultural.'

There are several upcoming municipal events where alcohol is set to be served by independent vendors, such as service clubs.

According to Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora, these events include Dance in the Park, the traditional kick-off to Canada Day celebrations typically held June 30 at Town Park, August's Ribfest Event, and the Concerts in the Park Summer Series held each July and August at Town Park.

Additionally, the Town has been looking for an alcohol provider for this year's Canada Day celebrations at Lambert Willson Park for the first time in more than 10 years, as well as at September's Saturday Night Fever event, where Yonge Street is closed between Wellington and Mosley Streets for a late-summer music extravaganza.

The Town, says Ware, is still looking at the implications of the Provincial announcement and is awaiting more detail to understand the various components of what is proposed.

Also awaiting more detail on the implications is the Rotary Club.

'For me, in the little Town of Aurora, in a perfect world you're envisioning someone coming in with their Stanley with their cocktail in it enjoying the music and that's it, then you have the other five per cent wheeling in that big cooler and it seems to be a bit of a mission,' says Wendy Browne of the Rotary Club of Aurora. 'For Rotary, the Dance in the Park and Ribfest are our major fundraisers that we put a lot of time into so that we can support the community when they put out requests for sponsorships and other support that they need.'

Putting together beer gardens at these events is no small feat, she adds, as it entails booking security, having Smart Serve qualified people doing the pouring, and more.

Should the new rules impact the funds services clubs are able to raise, Browne says the most immediate impact from a Rotary perspective will be a reduction in funds they can pour back into educational bursaries and team sponsorships, as well as helping to feed families in need during the holiday season.

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