

Say 'Hello' to Spring with distanced celebration in Arboretum

Spring is a time for rebirth and while we wait for the dawn of a new 'new normal' you can celebrate the start of a new season 'and Easter' next Saturday with 'Hello Spring,' hosted by the Town of Aurora.

Hello Spring is a new spin on the Town's traditional Easter Egg-stravaganza. Held at the John West Way entrance to the Aurora Community Arboretum, just behind the Aurora Seniors' Centre, Hello Spring will encourage pre-registered residents to get out and explore nature while taking part in themed outdoor activities and, of course, meet the Easter Bunny.

'In looking at Easter, our former event had thousands of people in attendance, so it was a matter of going back to basics to figure out how we can have a great experience with health guidelines in place, trying to keep it outside,' says Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora. 'It was a lot of brainstorming, looking at core elements, and what was the common denominator? The beginning of spring. From there, we looked at events that would follow the guidelines? not just follow them, but exceed them. We know that historically, the [Easter Egg Hunt] was really a true multigenerational event and we wanted to come up with some combination of hands-on activities for parents to do with their children and some individual activities like planting spring flowers.

'We want families to make good spring memories, knowing they are doing it safely.'

It wasn't only brainstorming that went into the event; planning also included tailoring activities to the varied terrain of the Arboretum, including the picturesque trails that go through the property.

'We have a very good relationship with the Easter Bunny, who always loves coming to Aurora,' says Ms. Ware. 'We were fortunate with our experience of welcoming Santa Claus over the Christmas period that we had a way to make the Easter Bunny safe, so the first activity on the agenda is families being able to have a COVID-safe photo opportunity with the Easter Bunny in Petch House. After that, families will 'hop' along the trail, which is where we will have interactive activities, the first stop being where children can plant spring flowers. They will have a chance to dig in the dirt, put the seedling in, water it and take it home to watch it grow and blossom over the next few weeks.

'Throughout the trail there will be Spring-themed jokes for the families, but we wanted to make it educational at the same time. Further down the trail, we have an Eye Spy, which is all about nature, there will be Fishing for Eggs where kids can 'fish' for plastic eggs on ribbons and place them in a basket. It's not the easiest activities, so it will be fun and frustrating too! Maybe kids can play against their guardians that come with them.'

Returning favourites include a 'Hopstacle Course' to keep kids active with minimal touch points, a return to nature with activities based around pine cones (you might need to warm up your pitching arm!) and huts along the way where kids twelve and under can collect activity bags brimming over with five different craft packages to continue the fun at home. Additional at-home activities will be launched online closer to the April 2 event.

'I love to watch the experiences and interactions with families,' says Ms. Ware, who has worked diligently over the last year, along with her team, to recreate some of the most popular and traditional family-friendly events to reflect present challenges. 'You can see how the experience transforms them and that is what I think defines success: helping to create memories that kids will be talking about not just that Saturday but weeks from now. We also hope the kids find a connection with that section of Aurora. Even though the predominant experience is with their family, they are experiencing a portion of their community.

'It is also about seeing the confidence and trust that attendees have with the Town to deliver a safe experience. In addition to that, seeing the confidence and trust they have placed in our volunteers, where we have exceeded the safety measures are required of us and people are going into this with confidence. It's the culmination of wanting to reach higher than is standard.'

Pre-registration for the Hello Spring activity begins this Thursday, March 25. Tickets are \$3 per person. The event itself will take place on Saturday, April 3 from 9.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m., with 30-minute timeslots available for booking. Pre-registration is required.

For more information, visit aurora.ca/hellospring.

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter