

Sheppard's Bush will be spooky destination this weekend as Haunted Forest returns

There will be plenty of chills at Sheppard's Bush this weekend as the ever-popular, and ever-spooky Haunted Forest returns to the Conservation Area this Saturday, October 26.

Set to run from 6 ? 9 p.m. at Sheppard's Bush, with family-friendly activities also taking place at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex on Industrial Parkway North, the event offers something for everyone ? from the youngest goblins having the chance to get up close and personal with some of their favourite characters, to older youth and adults able to take part in a bone-chilling experience.

Two types of wristbands are now on sale for Saturday's event at the AFLC, Aurora Town Hall, Aurora Town Square, the Joint Operations Centre, and the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex. A \$5 wristband will offer access to the family trail, family cabin and ghost stories, while a \$6 wristband offers access to all trails, all cabins, and ghost stories.

?We've had really good weather leading up to this, which has really enabled us to get to work and put the energy into our displays,? says Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora, noting that the two-wristband option has been put in place for the first time this year to address last year's ?massive? lineups to see the cabin space.

?Start your fun early with indoor activities at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex,? she continues. ?There is a minimum of seven different interactive family activities that people can participate in ? then they can get zoomed on a broom up to the Bush.?

It's not exactly a broom as shuttle buses run between each location, but Halloween is a time for imagination!

There in the Bush, Ware promises two trails with nearly 50 displays for all tastes, culminating in the cabin, which has been decked out in its ghoulish and beastly best by volunteers, the Knuth family. A family cabin, spearheaded by Marquee Theatrical Productions, will offer a pirate theme.

?Even for us, the Bush changes every single day as it matures and gets into the later fall season,? says Ware. ?Every step of the trail is going to be unique and it is going to be fresh. People are able to do the trails multiple times; they just have to keep going in the same direction. It's a lot to take in because we have displays on both sides of the trail. It really stops you in your tracks as you take in a certain display and go onto the next one.?

Helping bring the rest of the Haunted Forest to life this year will be more than 150 student volunteers who have been hard at work carving 200 pumpkins, which will illuminate the trails on the day of, creating additional displays with the Aurora Youth Engagement Committee, and more.

?The event is really created by the community for the community and it might be one of the reasons it has made the Top 100 Festivals and Events in Ontario list,? says Ware. ?It's nice that the community's efforts are celebrated, appreciated and known throughout the Province, and events of this nature are very unique. There are so many complex logistics that come into play far above just the weather-related impacts.

?Whether [attendees] are new to the event or returning, the Bush does look different every single year. If we have poor weather on the day of, it actually adds to the excitement and the eeriness of the Bush. A lot of care and attention is put towards making and ensuring it is an enjoyable family experience, but that there is also a really solid experience for those who are really coming for a good fright.

?We're several days ahead of Halloween, so this is another way for families to enjoy this holiday, which is the second-most participated-in holiday in the Canadian year. It's a big day, and with Halloween following the next week, a great way to kick off the

spirit in your families.?

For more on Aurora's 2024 Haunted Forest, visit aurora.ca/hauntedforest.

By Brock Weir