

Skate with the Tigers, meet Mayor and Council at next week's Levee

Get a chance to skate with your local hockey heroes next Saturday, January 25, as the Town of Aurora hosts a New Year's Levee at the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex.

Running from 2 ? 9.30 p.m., a full day of activities is planned for the Levee, which is hoped to become an annual activity after two previous Levees hosted in 2013 and 2017.

A Levee is a storied tradition in Canada with its roots in New France and has typically been a way to bring warmth and camaraderie to the start of a New Year. The tradition of a Levee has seen something of a resurgence in recent years, being first held in Aurora to mark the Town's Sesquicentennial in 2013.

After a further one-off event in 2017, organizers say the intention is to keep the Levee an annual event.

The fun gets underway at the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex (SARC) at 2 p.m. with a Leisure Swim until 4 p.m. From 4 ? 7 p.m., a Meet & Greet with Mayor Tom Mrakas and Council will take place while a public skate runs at the same time. Members of the Aurora Tigers are due to hit the ice between 4.30 and 5.30 p.m., before taking on the Markham Royals for a free game at the SARC beginning at 7.30 p.m.

All the while, between 4 and 7 p.m., cake, hot chocolate, crafts, and face painting will be offered to complete the fun.

?This is a great way to start off the New Year, where the community comes together and we celebrate together a lot of the things that are happening within our Town ? and just start (2020) off on the right foot,? says Mayor Mrakas. ?It is a [way] to say thank you to everyone in the community and for everyone to come out and get to meet others, meet us, and just have a good time together.?

Shelley Ware, Special Events Supervisor for the Town of Aurora, says that with an eye on keeping the Levee an annual tradition going forward, the aim is to create ?a really family-friendly fun event with lots of activities and lots of engagement, while still providing the opportunity for people to interact in groups and one-on-ones with members of Council.?

?Levees have a very strong historical tradition which is still exercised and respected all throughout Canada,? says Ms. Ware. ?It definitely dates back well before the seventeenth century, but historically it was a coming together of the people in the New Year to set the tone of what the New Year was going to bring to that community. With the enthusiasm and how driven our Council is, the Levee is a great opportunity to simply focus on what their plans are for the coming year. Even though Council participates in

countless events throughout the year, this event is strictly driven towards a conversational approach, looking at the year in advance of all the plans they want to accomplish, and all is accomplished through community input and collaboration.?

This is a sentiment shared with Mayor Mrakas, who adds:

?When you speak to Council and the Mayor, it is a great opportunity for the public to have a full understanding of what actually is occurring. Whether it is our tax rate, whether it's Library Square, the Armoury, Niagara College, traffic within the Town, the cannabis shop coming in, it is an opportunity for the public to actually hear the facts and what is actually happening.?

But it is all about fun as well.

?We're very enthusiastic to be able to have the Aurora Tigers,? says Ms. Ware. ?They have a home game that evening versus the Markham Royals and in addition to the game being free, the Tigers have generously offered their time so the whole team will be participating in the public skate from 4.30 ? 5.30 and then immediately following the skate, they are available for one on one interaction just prior to them shifting their focus to get ready for game time.

?I am personally excited to see the Tigers and to see them in that informal intimate setting. For them to skate with the public, they are like role models for several of the younger skaters. Just the presence and ability to skate with them is going to motivate so many younger athletes, whether hockey is their choice or not, it is such a healthy, positive role modelling opportunity. From the softer side of things, we have a bubble show and a balloonist planned. We have a few unique experiences we haven't had at other events, such as Family First Night and the Christmas market. There are going to be unique experiences that will be new for many.?

By Brock Weir