

Sledgehammers signal start of Armoury renovations



By Brock Weir

If Council had a hammer, they'd hammer in the morning. In fact, they'd also hammer in the evening all over this land. And on Wednesday, they did just that.

Taking 10 sledgehammers in hand, along with representatives of Niagara College's Canadian Institute of Food and Wine, dignitaries gathered on Wednesday night lay waste to an interior wall inside the historic Aurora Armoury.

It was not a way to vent hostility after a lengthy Council meeting the night before; instead, it was a celebratory atmosphere as each swing marked the start of a new partnership between the College and the Town.

Joining members of Council and Town Staff for the 'sledgehammer ceremony' were Craig Youdale, Dean of the Canadian Food and Wine Institute, along with Jeffrey Steen, their Manager of Industry Engagement and Corporate Training.

Although designs have not yet been finalized for the historic Town Park building which, under a new lease agreement with the Town, is set to become the newest campus for the Canadian Food and Wine Institute, offering short-term and part-time training in a newly renovated and restored facility, there is excitement in the air between the two partners.

'We are extremely excited to be here to start this project,' said Mayor Geoff Dawe at the start of the sledgehammering.

Added Mr. Youdale, ramping up the Mayor's enthusiasm: 'We are super-excited. We can't wait for this to get started and we can't wait for our team to be working up here in Aurora to help with this exciting project. It is going to be amazing.'

One by one, Council members, representatives from the College, and municipal staff lined up to take a swing or three at the wall, a newer addition to the original 1874 drill shed, signalling the start of the restoration work. But, while Mr. Youdale said his team are looking forward to getting up and working with Aurora on the project, he told *The Auran* this community outreach is already going strong.

'We have been contacted by many people in the Region just asking questions, offering possibilities and ideas,' he said. 'We have been working with some service and hospitality groups that want to do some classes up here. Because of its proximity to Toronto, we're also looking at bringing people up from Toronto to do some work and meet with some people who are doing catering and other food-type functions in the Region. It seems every week somebody contacts us and asks us questions, and they're all very positive and exciting.'

One particular possibility that has Niagara College excited is a possible 'cooperation' with St. Andrew's College on various projects and programs.

'Some of the first things we want to do [in the Armoury] are around hospitality, food and wine,' said Mr. Youdale. 'We also want to have classes around beer. We know craft beer is a real interest for people, so we want to be able to have some learning opportunity around that. We want to look at the space to have some events and social activities, more about getting people introduced to the building. In the first few weeks [of completion] we're looking at having open house-style events and bigger events so people can come in and get a feel for the space and what we can do. Then, we'll work towards more traditional classes after that.'

Now that the sledgehammering has begun, Mr. Youdale said the Canadian Institute of Food and Wine hopes to be in place by the

end of 2018, with a target towards the Christmas and New Year's season. This summer, with work hoped to be fully underway, he added the team will be at the Aurora Farmers' Market to meet and greet patrons and giving them a flavour of what the Institute will bring to Aurora.

‘Community use has been on our mind right from Day One,’ he said. ‘We want to make sure the community at large feels welcome in the area. Our team is going to be up here over the next few months staying for days at a time meeting with different groups in the area. The key is going to be finding out what the community wants. We're hoping to have access to the building for pretty much any group that is really looking for space, looking for training, looking for activity areas. We hope it becomes a real community centre in the sense of some extra things involved. We really don't want to feel there is any group who can't use this space in one shape or form.’