

Spirits remained ?sunny? during soggy Aurora 150 finale



By Brock Weir

With each step and every rhythmic thump, 21-month-old Celeste Oh's eyes got wider and wider.

Bundled up against the cold and lounging in her stroller with just a plastic sheet protecting her against the rain, and few feet of grass standing between her and the approaching dragon, she was initially pleased, seemed momentarily terrified, but overall spellbound by what was before her.

From either side of her well-protected stroller mom Christina, and sister Chantal also watched with interest. They were three of the few, but proud Aurorans who braved the highly inclement weather Saturday afternoon into the early evening for the Community Cultural Celebration, the final event on the Aurora 150 calendar.



Saturday's celebrations included performances from Aboriginal communities. Organized by Aurora's Sesquicentennial ad-hoc committee, it was designed to include the sights, sounds, and cuisine as many cultures as possible that call Aurora home. From that approach, the event was a success, bringing together Aboriginal presentations, and representation from cultures across Europe and well into Asia.

Mother Nature, however, had other ideas.

After hours of rain, Ada Johnson Park was quite damp as residents slogged down the hill to find a prime space to watch the events unfold. The venue was selected by the committee to bring more of a focus to newer communities on the east side of Aurora.

On the opposite side of the park was Rick Hansen Public School, a school opened earlier this year, and slated as the contingency location should the heavens open up. The permit obtained by the Committee to use the school was pulled at the last minute.

Despite the setback of the rain, those who made it through bundled up, dressed in layers, sporting raincoats and, in some cases, wielding multiple umbrellas. The event was a way to celebrate their own cultural heritage and their Town as well.

"I am of Hungarian background, my husband is Korean, so we have a lot of cultures in our house," said Christina Nagy-Oh, mother of Celeste and Chantal and a Town of Aurora employee who was strictly off duty at the time. "I love to take my kids to multicultural things."

The event brought together long-standing Aurora residents like Christine Alcock who has lived in the community for over 50 years, arriving at the the park equipped for almost any contingency, as well as Paul and Shauna Salomone, who moved to Aurora from Ottawa just two weeks ago with their two young children.

"It seemed like it was something interesting and fun," said Paul. "It's a little rainy, but that's okay - we don't mind. There's a great community atmosphere, and that seems like that is always the case in Aurora."

The Salmone family embraced what Mayor Geoffrey Dawe said the Community Cultural Celebration was all about.

"All we can do is bring a sunny attitude; we can't control the sun, but we can control our attitude," said Mayor Dawe. "I am so appreciative of the work the community has put into this. [Events like this] help cement the fact we have a great community and people like to do things together. These events start with the people."

Among the first performers were the Aboriginal Presentation, a regular feature on Aurora's cultural map, imparting their dance, music and traditions to the audience. They were followed by intricate performances from local martial arts students, dancers representing Crete, embracing and revitalizing their cultural traditions after they fell by the wayside in the latter half of the 20th century, Mystic Drums bringing together musical traditions from around the world geared to the younger crowd, and dancers and musicians representing Chinese culture stemming from the Falun Dafa traditions.

"It is unfortunate such a few people got to see it because it was really quite amazing," said Aurora 150 Chair Alison Collins Mrakas of the aboriginal presentation. "You can't do anything about the weather, but it was still a great thing. I think we were highly successful judging by the people who did make it out and the sun came through the clouds for the last two performances - and that was very fitting that it was during the Chinese fan dance."

Keeping the fact so few people decided to brave the rain, staying dry - and for the people living in the homes surrounding Ada Johnson Park, crowding into their windows and peeping out of their blinds to take in the celebration from the comforts of their own home - the Committee is giving serious reconsideration to planning an additional "re-do" event later this year.

Needless to say, if anything comes forward it will be planned for an indoor venue and funded from the more than \$100,000 left in their budget for the Sesquicentennial Celebrations.

"Fair play to our international food vendors and all of the performers who showed up to do their thing," said Ms. Collins-Mrakas. "We have had a scattering of people, but we're considering it. Let's face it: we have quite a bit of money left. We have to discuss it as a group, but we feel the public wanted a fourth event. We promised the public four events, but Mother Nature didn't cooperate."

"We're going to see what we can do to give them that fourth event."