

Spooky fun set to abound at Haunted Forest's return

Young ghouls and goblins looking to have some spooky fun with their families leading up to Hallowe'en can take terrifying trip down memory lane or make brand new memories as Aurora's Haunted Forest returns to Sheppard's Bush.

Held throughout the global pandemic at the Joint Operations Centre and retooled as Aurora's Haunted Greenhouses, the lifting of public health restrictions has allowed a return to the traditional Haunted Forest, and a much larger canvas for event planners to let their creativity fly.

'We haven't been back in the bush since 2019 and just in these last few years there has been so much growth in the Bush, from the height of the trees to the foliage, the Bush really has a personality of its own. We are excited to be back there, plotting and planning our way through the trails,' says Shelly Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora.

'We call this the 'pinata of Halloween' because we're plotting out between the family displays, the scary trail displays, trying to come up with various themes throughout as well as working within how the Bush is actually lying right now.'

Before revellers get to see what the Haunted Forest has in store for them on October 29, the fun will begin at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex with several ghoulish games planned to keep everyone busy and having fun while waiting for their shuttle over to Sheppard's Bush.

'We have three different craft stations, five different game stations, all Halloween-themed from scarecrow bowling, to Zombie eyeball toss, and some cool photo ops as well,' says Ms. Ware. 'There's something for everyone on the inside, regardless of age. Ultimately, you get an indoor experience, coupled with an authentic trail experience at the same time.'

Over at Sheppard's Bush, participants will be able to enjoy a scary trail that is not for the fainthearted, and another trail that is more kid-friendly. Bonfires are set to return, along with the Aurora Optimists, who will be there with their charity food truck, and additional food provided by Caterina's Kitchen.

'We always have to shake things up, so this year greater focus and attention will be spent on the exit trail,' says Ms. Ware. 'It is going to also be a different configuration in terms of where the bonfire is and the initial gathering of people. We're enjoying ourselves getting the Bush ready and the Bush is certainly cooperating, but it's also intense - it takes over 150 volunteers, which is more than 700 volunteer hours. At this point we do need volunteers who are willing to be a character. All the other positions in support roles have been full, but we're looking for more characters and actors who are willing to put on a costume and participate.'

'It is really special to have a unique trail experience with the Halloween theme. You would have to travel well out of your way, out of York Region and beyond, to find such an experience. Within the GTHA, this experience is local to you. It is definitely something to be explored. Halloween is the second most participated holiday out of the entire year and it is a holiday that is appealing for all age groups from little wee ones to teens, to adults, to even mature adults. It really is something for everyone and we do cater for all interest levels in the sense that we have family trails vs. scary trails but it is something you don't need to travel out of Aurora. Come in and see what we have to offer.'

'[And] for those who haven't experienced the event before, they may never have experienced the Bush to begin with, so coming to the event may mean that you return as a trail walker thereafter.'

Registration for the October 29 Haunted Forest event is open now at aurora.ca/hauntedforest. Wristbands are \$5 per person for participants two years of age and older and can be purchased at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex, Aurora Town Hall, and the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex.

The event runs from 6 - 9 p.m.

A Top 100 Festivals & Events in Ontario honouree, this year's Haunted Forest is presented by Healthy Planet.

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