

Spooky Saturday as Haunted Forest takes over Sheppard's Bush



Do you think you have what it takes to walk the scariest trail in Aurora this weekend?

Put on your boots and grab your flashlight for the Town's annual Haunted Forest, which takes over Sheppard's Bush this Saturday night.

Featuring a kid-friendly trail and another for those who aren't among the faint-of-heart, this year's favourite Hallowe'en event will feature all new chills and returning favourites.

Along the trails, young ghouls and goblins will find their favourite haunted houses, which take over the log cabins within Sheppard's Bush, but there will be more this year than ever before. Dotting the trail will be several wooden huts, created last year for the Aurora Christmas Market, which have had spooky makeovers for the occasion ? well, one or two might be a little less spooky as The Auroran has it on good authority that one might be a magical fairyland complete with princesses ? and organizers have shaken up the traditional trail routes to keep people on their toes.

?We've changed our trail configurations and that always throws people off,? says Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora with a laugh. ?You can tell when you see those who come back year after year because you hear them arguing about the routes.?

Will any of those arguments give way to blood curdling screams? You'll have to find out for yourself, but Ms. Ware says even if you think the scarier of the trails might be too much for you, it's worth giving it a shot.

?A person should push themselves to go outside their comfort limit,? she says. ?This is for our community, everything is replicated,

it's definitely not real, but you would be surprised how much of a thrill you can take. New this year, we have a baton club performing with glow batons positioned throughout the trails to keep people going further and further.?

Whichever trail you ultimately decide to take ? that is, if you don't decide to do both ? at the end is a community bonfire, which Ms. Ware says is always a highlight.

?Something as simple as the bonfire really brings people of all ages together,? she says. ?You see hundreds of people, adults all talking to each other, all recognizing someone coming out of the trail, and a new connection is made. In a strange way, Haunted Forest is definitely a community gathering, but it is also like a homecoming for people who don't really see each other too often during the year.?

But people come to the Haunted Forest from well beyond our community ? thanks in part to it being recognized once again this year as one of the Top 100 Festivals & Events in Ontario, an honour decided by Festivals & Events Ontario. (FEO)

?It is a huge surprise and honour to be able to make that list,? says Ms. Ware, giving kudos to all the community partners ? dozens ? who come together each year to ensure the event's success. ?We have won this hand-in-hand with our community. With all our events, we try to make each year's experience unique and new so you will be motivated to return year after year. Because we are pulling together with community partners over 40 displays, there's a lot of innovative thinking, creativity and actual sweat pulling everything together, but we're also trying to balance out the subject matter because some people who have never been to the event don't know how scary it is, or they think it is too scary. Meanwhile, we really are catering to all members of the family.?

Community organizations, even if they're not part of the planning process, are also set to benefit from the Haunted Forest.

Although admission is just a \$5 wristband per person which can be purchased in advance from the Aurora Family Leisure Complex, Town Hall, or the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex (SARC), donations of gently-worn winter clothes are also encouraged to be brought along for those in need.

It's the time of year that people are going through their closets and piecing together their winter wardrobes, thinning out what they don't want and what might not fit anymore. Bringing what you're thinking of getting rid of this Saturday will be a way of paying it forward and ensuring that items end up in good hands.

?We will be collecting gently-used winter items both at Sheppard's Bush and at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex and these will be redirected to associations and groups that can make great use of them,? says

Ms. Ware. "We will happily take them off your hands so we can get them into other hands who greatly need it."

It also might be a good idea, she adds, to bring a flashlight.

"Sheppard's Bush is a gorgeous property but people need to be mindful it is a natural trail. Having said that, there are roots on the ground as you're walking. It is very bumpy and dark at night for three quarters of the event, so we encourage people to bring flashlights to see the ground they are walking on, and also to be mindful. They are not walking across a soccer field, it is an organic, natural trail system. We want people to have the thrills and enjoy themselves, but we also want people to be mindful of the ground they are stepping on so they don't trip and fall."

Aurora's Haunted Forest takes over Sheppard's Bush this Saturday, October 26, from 6 - 9 p.m. For more information, including wristbands, visit aurora.ca/hauntedforest. Shuttle buses to Sheppard's Bush will be running between the Aurora Family Leisure Complex and the Conservation Area.

By Brock Weir