

Stories of Aurora ? and Canada ? integral to Community Mural project



By Brock Weir

Whether it is a relaxing feeling of sitting in a Muskoka chair, beer in hand, looking over a lake at sunset, or memories of standing on the side of Yonge Street watching Terry Fox go by on his Marathon of Hope, 'Canada' can be an evocative phrase.

As it turns out, it is a perfect springboard for the community to converge and brainstorm ideas for the Canada 150 Milestone Mural which will be a lasting legacy in Aurora marking the sesquicentennial of Canadian Confederation.

Led by the Aurora Cultural Centre's Ted Hamer, the group has been out in the community collecting your stories and your vision for Canada and the second of two public visioning sessions will take place next Thursday, August 3, from 3 - 6 p.m. at the Aurora Cultural Centre.

'People have been very supportive,' says Mr. Hamer of the consultations that have taken place so far, both at the Centre itself, but also out at wider community events such as the Canada Day celebrations at Lambert Willson Park and at the Aurora Farmers' Market on Saturday mornings. 'People are very excited to have something like this in Town and they have given me almost every idea possible for the Town, going from the historical persons who have lived here, to nature. Nature is a big thing here and I am very happy with that.

'The other thing I wasn't aware of was Aurora's commitment to volunteerism and especially the commitment to newcomers. I didn't know how many Syrian families were sponsored here initially, and that is a really neat thing to want included on the mural.'

Hamer, a Toronto-based artist with a particular penchant for creating outdoor murals is not only taking ideas from adults, but, in his role as the Centre's Community Arts Facilitator, he receives new and creative ideas from the next generation, teaching them about murals in an arts camp setting.

He says he is teaching camp-goers the basics of mural art through the lens of Canada 150, and the walls in the basement Pine Tree Potters Activity Room shows just that, with hand-drawn murals featuring Canadian icons like the C.N. Tower, poutine, and just about everything in between.

Some of their contributions are simple concepts like animals, but some of them can be more complex, contemplating what Canada might be like decades or centuries down the road.

'The depth to which they go with some of their storytelling surprises me,' says Mr. Hamer.

The depth of the adults is providing plenty of fodder for the creative mind as well.

Community contributions to the mural project include ideas related to history and nature, but people are also coming in with poems, stories and photographs they would like to see incorporated into the finished product in some way.

'I am getting photography from some people, which I will have to interpret as a painting because we don't have the ability to put a photograph on it,' says Hamer of the mural, which will eventually be installed on outdoor panels. 'People have wanted to make it a 3D sculptural thing, and I have some ideas about that, but we're limited due to Canada and the winter. I can't stick sculpture on it because it will pop off and we have technical limits out there.'

At the moment, however, the use of panels is the only concrete detail - so to speak - at this point, slightly to Mr. Hamer's chagrin, as he is anxious to get the word out just where the mural will be installed and the form it will ultimately take.

?ASAP ? in **BIG BOLD LETTERS**,? he says, with emphasis, on when he would like to have these details made public. ?I am poking the people upstairs daily to get those gears moving,? he adds with a laugh.

But, in the meantime, it is all about collecting stories for that all-important finished product.

?I would love people to come out and bring their stories ? not only of Aurora, but Canada,? he says. ?While Canada 150 is a national birthday, I am hoping people will focus on that through their stories, especially on Aurora. That could be someone telling me the story of watching Terry Fox run, it could be telling me the stories of the nature here, the horse trade here, of their neighbours.

Somebody at the last session said their Canadian experience was sunset on a lake and two Muskoka chairs. That is what they think of when they close their eyes and think of Canada, and that is what I am hoping to get. We can get the historical figures and all those from books and everyone else, but I want the personal stories. That is what I am hoping to get.?

The next Community Consultation ? open to all ages ? will take place at the Aurora Cultural Centre on Thursday, August 3, from 3 ? 6 p.m. In addition to the stories, Mr. Hamer is also hoping to connect with local Aurora artists as he is eyeing opportunities for different artists from all media to contribute to the finished product.