

There's no escaping the smoky sizzle of Ribfest ? or is there?

By Brock Weir

Ribfest arrives this week, bringing with it a unique, smoky sizzle that is a welcome escape from any boring and hum-drum mealtime. But, if the smoky and tangy ribs, the savoury bloomin' onions and the sweet Beaver Tails aren't enough ?escape? for you, Aurora has another trick up its sleeve ? Blackbeard's Brig, a new ?escape experience? which can put your logic and lingo up to the test. Based on the ?escape room? concept, which are exploding in popularity as group and party destinations, this will be a first for Aurora's Ribfest which will feature classic music favourites Harlequin and David Wilcox.

?We're building from scratch the first municipal mobile escape experience that we want to launch at Ribfest,? explains Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora. ?Staff have brainstormed from scratch and created a mobile escape experience which is actually going to be pirate-themed. Teams of up to four people can attempt to see if they can solve riddles and clues for a successful escape.?

Teams who do manage to escape the pirate's clutches will be entered into a draw for a barbeque gift set, as well as free entry to Aurora's Hallowe'en-time Haunted Forest, which is favourite on kids' social calendars each October.

?Different Town Staff groups have been the guinea pigs for us to assess how smooth and prepared we are,? says Ms. Ware of the escape experience, advising, ?those who will be successful will need to be fluent in pirate-speak and should have a comfort level with nautical coordinates.?

The development of Blackbeard's Brig is just one example of the ways organizers try to keep a perennial party fresh, exciting and offering something new for seasoned ribbers to newbies.

?Two big trends are the foodie trend ? and I think with the diverse palate covered at Ribfest we have covered off that angle quite nicely ? and the second huge trend emerging in the special events industry is the escape experience,? says Ms. Ware. ?People want to experience things, do things that take them out of their comfort zone, things they wouldn't have tried before, and escape rooms are becoming common now. In Aurora, a new escape room [on Edward Street] just opened up two weeks ago and we have been working on this for several months now. This just confirmed we're on track with the trend.?

If escape rooms aren't your thing, there is also something new to tickle the most experienced palate with the Hog Father, a new rib team ?From the deep, south hills of Tennessee? joining the Ribfest circuit.

?We are very excited to welcome them into the Aurora Ribfest Family,? says Ms. Ware. ?In addition to that, I think Ribfest really has a great balance of foods. Personally, I am a fan of the roasted corn on the cob as well as the roasted yams, and I don't know anyone who can escape Ribfest without wanting or even having a Bloomin' Onion, as well as Beaver Tails. There really is something for every palate. Some people think of Ribfest and they only think of the meat component, but I think Ribfest really does cater and offer a real variety. Even those who are perhaps vegetarian will find something just as tasty to those who do enjoy ribs.?

Away from the grills, fryers and roasters, the action will take place on the main stage. In addition to Friday's headliner of Harlequin and David Wilcox the following night, entertainment will include the Top 20 semi-finals of Magna's Hoedown Showdown, which is looking to find Canada's next country star.

Working the Canada 150 theme, all of Ribfest's entertainment will hail from Canada. Saturday's entertainment lineup will open with Winnipeg Wind, a tribute to the Guess Who. On Sunday, youth band Louisa and the Planets, featuring Louisa Barbosa, will take the stage, while the festivities will close with the Stacey Renee Band.

?This, in my opinion, truly is a homecoming event and it certainly has become a summer tradition for many residents and it is always with a lot of pride when you overhear people talking and they mention how they have invited friends up to Aurora to visit them because of this event,? says Ms. Ware, underscoring Ribfest as a ?green? event as well.

?A lot of people don't realise that 90 per cent of the disposable by-product is all either compostable or recyclable. The green initiative is something that we're quite proud of, that it would be nice for people to realise, especially when they go to dispose of their by-product that we have gone to great efforts to ensure that it is as green as possible.?

For more on the Festivities, visit www.aurora.ca/ribfest.