

Town inks deal with Slabtown Cider to take over Armoury



The historic Aurora Armoury will have a new lease on life as a new home for Slabtown Cider.

The new lease agreement between the Town of Aurora and the Uxbridge-based cidery was announced Tuesday, and will see the family-run business bring a full-service restaurant, music and themed programming to the facility while still maintaining it as a space for the community.

It's a five-year lease with the option for another five years.

Operating as Slabtown Armoury, the company aims to be operational in its new space by October 1 where, from Monday to Wednesday, it will host community group bookings, local popup events, and private functions, while Thursday to Sunday will see doors opened to the public for farm-to-table dining and more.

"This is a huge win for our community and for downtown Aurora," said Mayor Tom Mrakas in a statement. "The Armoury has always been one of our most unique and important spaces, and now it is going to be alive with people, events, music, food, and community activity all year long.

"Slabtown's vision brings exactly the kind of energy and creativity we want to see as we continue building a more vibrant and dynamic downtown."

Added Slabtown Cider co-owner Lori Feddema: "We are thrilled to bring Slabtown to the heart of Aurora and breathe new life into the historic Armoury. From live music to locally-inspired food and our signature ciders and beer, Slabtown Armoury will be a place for everyone to gather, connect and celebrate."

The Slabtown Cider Company was founded in Uxbridge in 2017 and the origin of its name derives from the Uxbridge hamlet of Randallville, which was nicknamed "Slab Town" due to the lumber it produced.

Their Uxbridge location, which will continue operation as normal, boasts 90 acres and its owners have been working hard to amass one of Canada's largest collections of heirloom apple varieties.

"The Armoury is very much in line with Slabtown's brand as well as our brand is based out of the 1800s and it's the whole idea of

taking something and adding that modern feel to it, but still appealing and preserving the history,? Lori Feddema tells The Auroran. ?That was a real pull for us. Aurora is a great community and there's a lot to offer there. We just look forward to serving the community in a different way than I guess we do in Uxbridge. In Uxbridge, we're very rural, we're in the country, where Aurora it's a community right in the heart of the Town and we're really looking forward to that.?

Feddema says once they are fully operational in the Armoury space, they will offer various craft beverages and food that continues to be inspired by its farm-to-table philosophy, including showcasing local farms and farmers.

?We will have a full restaurant, but then we will also have community space for different groups to come in, feature their products or have meetings,? she says. ?The Farmers' Market is right there [in Town Park], so during the time the Farmers' Market is not running, in the winter months, we have ideas of how to feature those businesses in our restaurant, whether that's featuring a farm on our menu or having them in with pop-ups for our guests to enjoy.

?We are very much about the community and we're very much about featuring farm-to-table and making sure that we can offer something for everyone. We're a family-run business and now we're bringing that to the community of Aurora and the space will just be there for everyone to enjoy. Live music is a huge part of what we do, so we will be bringing that piece and the Armoury is set up very nice for live music. We'll be featuring local artists at the Aurora Armoury and may have different groups come in [including] emerging artists.?

The Town noted in its announcement that Slabtown Armoury intends to also work with schools, non-profit groups, community organizations and more to ?create inclusive and memorable experiences.?

?In addition, the Town of Aurora and Slabtown plan to explore future opportunities to collaborate on community celebrations and cultural programming, with the Armoury serving as a venue that can support and enhance Town-led events,? said the Town. ?The new agreement with Slabtown is expected to create more than 25 new jobs, with an emphasis on hiring locally from Aurora and the surrounding area. By sourcing ingredients from nearby farms and producers, Slabtown Armoury will also help support small businesses and strengthening regional supply chains. Importantly, the lease agreement provides ongoing revenue to the Town while preserving the building's full public ownership.?

The Aurora Armoury, located in the northeast corner of Town Park at Larmont and Mosley Streets, was built in 1874 as a drill shed for the Queen's York Rangers, and served as the local base for the Regiment until the building was sold to the Town of Aurora by the Federal Government in 2014 and the Regiment moved to the former Aurora Hydro building on Industrial Parkway South.

The Regiment remains in the building, which has since been re-named the Lieutenant-Governor John Graves Simcoe Armoury.

After extensive renovations, the historic Armoury was taken over by Niagara College's Canadian Food & Wine Institute.

Niagara College pulled out of the facility, as well as the Aurora Town Square Café they had been operating, this past spring.

The café space is now operated by Newmarket's My Indie Coffee.

?The new partnership with Slabtown builds on that foundation, continuing the Armoury's proud legacy as a community hub and as a lively, welcoming centre for food, culture and connection in downtown Aurora,? said the Town.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter