

Ukrainian dancers to take centre-stage at multicultural festival

Ukrainian dancers will be among the performers to take centre stage at Town Park this weekend as it hosts the Town's annual Multicultural Festival.

The Multicultural Festival will take place this Saturday, September 24, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., with a full menu of dancing, music and food from around the world and the common culinary thread being the international staple rice.

The Multicultural Festival is typically an early September feature on the calendar, but is taking place towards the end of the month this time to serve as the official launch of Culture Days.

"We're proud to align with Culture Days and for this event to be the official kick-off from September 24 to October 16 for the Provincial and National celebration of Culture Days and that is something very exciting this year," says Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora.

Cultures set to be represented this year at the festival include those of Spain, Iran, Afghanistan, Brazil, China, France, Poland, Japan, a number of Caribbean nations, and Ukraine.

"It's always nice to mix it up a little bit, but a factor that goes into this is also to make sure that even though these are culturally authentic dance performances, we also want to focus on the authentic textiles that dancers wear," says Ms. Ware. "This gives us another lens as to how we learn about culture. For instance, the Iranian and Afghan performances, their textiles and what they wear are just mesmerizing and beautiful from tip to tail, whereas the Caribbean dancers take us on a completely different, fresh visual.

"Of course, we're all excited to see the Ukrainian dancers. I think it's important to remind them as well as our community that we are all standing in solidarity. As well, we have had Ukrainian performers in the last several years, but it's more important to have the opportunity to learn about their culture, learn more about their people and their traditions, in addition to what we see prevalent in the news. This is still a celebration of all cultures, so it will be really, really nice for the finale of this beautiful, colourful day to conclude with the Ukrainian dancers."

Throughout it all, the culinary thread that will be woven throughout the day will be rice, a grain that is integral to so many cultures the world-over.

With help from local chefs, rice will be prepared at the festival in nine different ways representing nine different cultures.

"Rice is something that is predominantly available to almost all populations, but in terms of how it is prepared, how it tastes, it's all very different. Attendees will get to taste different flavour combinations from a variety of cultures as well. We will have a food demo in the afternoon and it will be interesting to see when you have an authentic chef making it, which we have in Crave It Catering making a tomato risotto. I am hoping that when the chef demonstrates it, it's something I can actually walk away and make myself!"

Now that restrictions related to the global pandemic have been lifted, hands-on games and activities will be the order of the day away from the bandshell and cooking demonstrations. Within the "Community Zone," more than 12 different community groups will participate providing several interactive demonstrations and activities promoting the theme of the day.

Among the participating groups are: Girls Inc, who will be offering activities that symbolize their principles of "Smart, Strong and Bold"; the Aurora Historical Society, which will offer an activity to "go back in time with historical objects and send out a postcard"; the York Region Football Association, which will test your agility with an obstacle course, with a tackling wheel, kicking net, and more; The Aurora Sports Hall of Fame, which will offer a cornhole activity; the Aurora Cultural Centre with portrait painting; and much more.

Also among them will be Hands-On Exotics who will be there with their educational presentation featuring live animals.

“We’re not only learning about cultures and their rhythm and movements, as well as their culinary approaches, but also how other animals coexist on other continents,” says Ms. Ware. “In addition to that, we certainly have lots of fun games for the children with bouncy castles, mini-fishing, there will be lots of bean bag tosses, a craft station representing different continents based on crafts, so it really is a lot to be offered.

“We want to centralize and showcase how this is going to be the kick-off to Culture Days and we really want to encourage people, whether we’ve listed a culture that’s of interest to you or not, to come out with a strong sense of curiosity because it’s really as a community and as we learn about each other and foster our curiosity that we really grow together and we grow together stronger.”

Beyond the in-person activities, several online and virtual features will be part of this year’s Festival.

For more information on in-person and virtual programs, visit aurora.ca/multiculturalfestival.

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