

York Region kicks off Digital Pride this Wednesday

We still have to keep our distance, but the community is set to come together virtually this Wednesday, June 2, for the kick-off of Digital Pride in York Region.

Spearheaded by the York Pride Festival and community partners, this will be the second year running that events have had to take place in the virtual realm, but organizers have come up with new ways to keep the event fresh throughout the month of June.

?As the sun sets to the west, Digital Pride is getting fired up on the east side of Newmarket as we prepare to rock the Digital Stage for opening night of York Pride,? say organizers. ?We've seriously drawn some wildcards for this evening packed with stellar performances. In the artist lineup, you can expect various styles of drag, involving vogueing and untamed outfit realness. Who knows, you might even catch a king on site.

?Continuing into the night, we feature home-grown talent from the north of York Region as we dabble in the catchy tunes of country along with performances from another band that's sure to get you on your feet. And to top it all off, we go behind the intense heat and witness the deadly art of fire dancing as they lash out some extremely incredible visual displays. Anticipate wicked lighting, bursts of smoke, confetti and pyrotechnics as we celebrate the first night of Season Two of Digital Pride Live with you from the comfort of your own home.?

The fun continues with the distribution of ?experiences boxes? on June 4, which encourages people to share in the same culinary experiences from their own homes ? cooking and eating together ?like a true family.? Proceeds from the sale of these ?experience boxes? will go towards Rainbow Camp to help send 2SLGBTQ+ Canadians to camp.

Further programs include Express Yourself on June 7, a workshop focused on self expression, body positivity and ?life-affirming and creative movement exercises? all with an aim of helping you uncover ?more authentic versions of you.?

Your Voice is the theme for June 9, a time for ?young 2SLGBTQ+ Canadians to have their voices ?heard loud and clear.?

?Through passionate conversations and real lived experiences, youth within the Greater Toronto Area and York Region will share real fears, constructive criticisms and their feelings on the ever-changing landscape of our communities,? say organizers. ?This is your chance to be unapologetically truthful, to spark change, and make strides to raise awareness on ongoing issues in our community.?

Programming will continue through June 30 and, in the coming weeks, The Auroran will share more of what's to come.

These conversations, however, are not only being sparked by York Pride. Pflag York Region is also hard at work during Pride Month to provide programs and services to the 2SLGBTQ+ community.

June marks the first anniversary that Pflag York Region has had to reconfigure their events for virtual participants and while there have been some challenges, Pflag president Tristan Coolman says opportunities have presented themselves as well.

?Our Coffee Night ?Let's Chat' events that we have monthly now is really a reflection of that,? says Mr. Coolman on the discussion forum hosted in partnership with the Aurora Public Library. ?We've been able to do different webinars and educational seminars and for the first time we're actually streaming live, too. We're trying to make these events as accessible as possible because people are going to be celebrating Pride from home this year and we want to make it as successful as it can be.

?I think about what Pride means to me. Regardless of the efforts we are all trying to do to make these online events special, I still think about how special it was to participate in the capacity of Pflag [being] out at Pride and having that perspective, versus just visiting casually, almost as a tourist. There is no replacing what in-person Pride is and these events are not trying to replace it, but

they are meant to be as much about the community as possible.?

For more on the events York Pride has to offer for the second annual Digital Pride Festival, visit YorkPride.ca. Further information on Pflag York Region, including virtual Coffee Nights, head over to pflagyork.ca.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter