

Cycle Aurora ready to take off this Canada Day

Canada Day is Monday, and what better way to celebrate than to leave your car at home and explore your small corner of the country.

Cycle Aurora, the annual initiative aimed to get Aurora residents out on their bikes to explore the community, launches July 1 with more than 45 challenges for participants to see more of the Town and find new destinations for themselves and their families.

Registration for this free event closes Sunday, June 30, and is intended to "build a strong link between nature, trails as well as culture and art" through the earmarked destinations, according to Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora.

The destinations and missions have been developed by Ware and Jen Sault Turla, who first pitched Cycle Aurora at the height of the global pandemic as a fun way for individuals and families to stay active and get outside in a safe and responsible way.

Since restrictions related to the pandemic have eased, the annual event has only grown in popularity.

"Cycle Aurora is about moving you around Town, maybe seeing places that wouldn't have been on your radar," says Ware of Cycle Aurora, whose missions are powered through the Goosechase app. "This is a tool for moving you around to see a cross-section of the gems and leisure opportunities that exist in this community. A lot of people who live here really benefit from how many leisure opportunities there are and I think if you're new to the Town, it enables you to get out and experience first-hand all four corners of Aurora and everything in between."

It's also a chance to explore local businesses as many of the missions have been created to take participants to and past many places of commerce, including some that have offered up products and gift cards to serve as weekly prizes throughout the Cycle Aurora period.

Cycle Aurora is just one initiative underway in the community to promote the use of bikes and getting out to explore the community. Turla is also the lead on the similarly-named Aurora Cycles, which serves as a social group for local bike enthusiasts as well as a collective voice to advocate for cycling infrastructure improvements and the development of new amenities like bike racks and multi-use paths.

"There are so many synergies here, hence the names that are almost exactly the same," says Turla with a laugh. "With Aurora Cycles, we have been just testing the water and continuing to grow."

One new initiative offered by Aurora Cycles this season is a roster of group rides. While group rides have proved a bit of a challenge to integrate into the Cycle Aurora challenge, they have helped Aurora Cycles burn rubber in the best possible way.

"The group ride was a ton of fun and it's great because we have all types of individuals in terms of young and old, brand-new riders, experienced riders, and every kind of bike you can imagine," says Turla. "Organizing the first group ride, we wanted to keep people as safe as possible because we knew there would be kids coming out as well, but also to enjoy a mix of the infrastructure we have here in Town. We're so lucky to have the Arboretum and trails. We're making use of the multiuse paths that we do have, giving people the opportunity to see that it's possible to bike around Town, getting them more comfortable with the different routes you can take, that it will be safe—we didn't want to do just the trails because no one would see us; we want people to see a big group of bikers going down the road just to create that visibility for cycling in Aurora and that it is something people enjoy and we should account for active transportation in our plans."

"We're starting to have those conversations in terms of what we want to bring to the Town and Region in the next year and it definitely is a goal of ours to do a delegation to the Town?. This year, I think it is going to be about more group rides, to have more people experience and appreciate the infrastructure that is there and identify opportunities so that we can gather that feedback and

bring it forward to the Town and the Region. As part of our group rides, which we definitely did on the first one, is having the conversations with the businesses as well. Attracting cyclists is a great way to attract customers to your business, making sure you have the infrastructure in place so they can park their bikes and that sort of thing. That will be part of the advocacy there ? the conversation with different owners of the commercial units, ensuring they put their best foot forward for attracting cyclists with bike infrastructure.?

In the meantime, Cycle Aurora is a top-of-mind priority over the summer.

Ware says many of the initial missions will be Canada Day-driven and will then include 10 to 13 missions each week through September 1 0?with the potential for a ?grand finale? mission closer to the start of the new school year.

The more missions you complete, the greater your chance of winning hospitality-based gift cards, prizes from a local cycling store, and additional incentives.

?I love Cycle Aurora and how it is so flexible in terms of adding new missions, trying new things, and supporting events that the Town has planned,? says Turla. ?By incorporating the event as part of a mission, it really gets people out and about on their bikes.?

To register for Cycle Aurora 2024, visit aurora.ca/cycleaurora by June 30. The initiative runs from July 1 to September 1.

For more on the Aurora Cycles initiative, visit them on Facebook and Instagram.

By Brock Weir