

From crafts to crepes, Aurora marks Culture Days



By Brock Weir

Aurorans were treated to the flavours of the past and visions of the future as Culture Days kicked off Saturday.

Bringing together the Aurora Farmers' Market, Aurora Historical Society, Aurora Cultural Centre and Aurora Public Library, the day offered relaxation, and plenty of opportunities to get those creative juices flowing.

The morning got off to a tasty start at the Farmers' Market as resident chefs dusted off old family recipes to whip up culinary dishes that would have graced Aurora plates back in 1863. Delicacies included fresh salads made with ingredients found at the market, comfort foods, soups, and a variety of sweets and savouries.

At noon, people gathered around the cooking table as Chef Marcel whipped up crepes Suzettes with fresh orange zest.

"It's an old recipe," he said. "We are celebrating the 150 years of Aurora, so we decided to make an old recipe for an old city." Market-goers still saved some room for the crepes despite the other dishes also moving like, well, like hotcakes.

Nick Vannan put a classic spin on a favourite potato soup, using sweet condensed milk rather than fresh milk for an authentic flavour.

"Back then, unless you had a cow five feet from your house, you wouldn't have been able to have fresh milk," he said. "I used that with some potatoes, some fresh bacon and everyone loved it. I ran out of samples in five minutes. I felt this recipe showcased the old style of food."

Also keeping it old school was Melvin Laidlaw, also known as "Mr. Spinners." Laidlaw normally specializes in the hot tastes of the islands, but he showed considerable restraint with his spice rack when preparing baked beans.

"I used things that would have been prevalent in those days like maple syrup and molasses," he said. "I didn't use any foreign spices, just onions and tomato, which I sautéed at the bottom of the pan with herbs like thyme and tarragon. It was a very typical baked bean you would get here 150 years ago."

"I am trying to be true with the times. Back then, people weren't going to be kicking it up with scotch peppers. It would be blander, but the molasses and maple syrup would give you your flavour. We ate more real back then."

Meanwhile, over at the Aurora Cultural Centre, artists from across Aurora and York Region gathered to give people on their own Culture Days tour a flavour of a wide variety of art forms, from filmmaking, glassmaking, to more conventional abstract and encaustic art.

Skill-building workshops were hosted by John Watson and Rob Comeau via the Multimedia Film Festival of York Region, while Greg Locke and Miiko were in the galleries to talk about their joint exhibition Abstractions, featuring their abstracts and glass.

Upstairs, people had the chance to leave their mark on a community art project by Michelle van Nie and Robin Burnett, invited to etch what the Canadian landscape means to them into wax.

'We had a boy here who had just moved from Mexico and he wanted to write 'snow' as that is what he thinks when he thinks of the Canadian landscape,' explained van Nie. 'When people see an encaustic work, they want to touch it and be a part of it. We thought this way people would be able to have that chance.'

Literacy was on tap next door at the Library where artists, writers, and community members offered their talents and knowledge for a day that included puppet shows, an exhibition from the Aurora Studio Tour, slam poetry courtesy of Sterling Dillinger, and six 'human books' to check out for the afternoon.

'I was at an arts event and was asked to give a definition of culture and I said Culture is something that happens whenever people get together,' said Reccia Mandelcorn of the Aurora Public Library. 'We all have our stories. Whether you are a human book, whether you are a writer, or whether you are a musician, there is something cultural in each of us. The synergy when we get together and make it all work is what really grows culture.'

Near the end of the circuit was an afternoon of music, poetry and performance at Hillary House, as well as the launch of a new photo contest which you can follow on Facebook.