

## Ribfest is not just about the ribs ? it's about the experience: organizers

**By Brock Weir**

Escape rooms, ax throwing, and trying your hand at riding a mechanical bull are not typically things you would associate with the sizzle of barbecued ribs, but 2018's Aurora Ribfest has other ideas.

For organizers, this year's event, which runs this Friday, August 24 through Sunday, August 26, is all about having a full experience. Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora, has only tried riding a mechanical bull once before. While she says she doesn't think that one "disastrous" experience qualifies her for giving any pro-tips, she says heading out to Machell Park this weekend will tick boxes on the lists of the most finicky of patrons.

"People always say life is getting busier and evolving," she says. "So are the expectations of our attendees. There is a full roster of activities out there, and regardless of where you live, there are so many exciting things to see and do. The more I feel we're able to offer people that provides something new and different, the more we're going to catch their eye."

Ribfest first featured the Escape Room concept last year. While this inaugural Escape Room was done in-house by the Town, a move which Ms. Ware says was "a big success," coming on board this year to kick the experience up a notch is Labyrinth Escape Rooms, a local business that has been operating out of a location on Edward Street for the past two years.

Ribfest patrons will have the chance to see if they have what it takes to escape, and wield the ax, on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, but you have to act fast if you want to saddle up the mechanical bull. This feature will only be available on Friday between 5.30 and 9.30 p.m.

But, at the end of the day, Ribfest is "all about the ribs, bibs and sauce."

This year's event welcomes "ribbers" from as close to home as Fort Erie with Bone Daddy's to, new this year, Sticky Fingers from Castleberry, Alabama, who will be whipping up their own unique spins on pork ribs, pulled pork, chicken, and more, vying for a trophy in the "Best of" showdown that will take place on Sunday morning.

In between the first flicker of flame on the grill to the last spot of sauce sopped up, there will be a wide-array of entertainment hitting the stage.

The Stacey Renee band kicks things off on Friday night, warming up the crowd for headliner Triumph's Rik Emmett and RESolution 9.

Saturday's festivities opens with a performance by Lou Moore & Friends, followed by the 2018 Hoedown Showdown semi-finals, which will see the Top 20 contestants vying to be Canada's next country star sing out to secure a spot in the Top 10 Finals, which will go down next month at the Magna Hoedown.

The Top 20 will compete between 1.15 and 5.15, and the proceedings will be emceed by Beverley Mahood.

"This is a really cool opportunity to see some brand-new talent and see them give it all they got to make it through this round," says Ms. Ware.

Following the Semi-Finals, the stage is handed to Wendy Laurier and the Renaissance Band, which is a local favourite in Simcoe County.

They will be followed by Platinum Blonde, Saturday's headliner, while the music continues Sunday with The Good Brothers and Rose Cora Perry & The Truth Untold.