

Saturday's Haunted Forest serves up Halloween Spooktacular?



BACK TO THE WOODS ? October is a spooky time for Sheppard's Bush. Recently, Erika, Alex, Crystal, and Seema helped transform it into a place fit for The Walking Dead at the Fourth Annual Zombie Run, organized by Girls Inc. to benefit the United Way. This Saturday, Sheppard's Bush will be transformed once again for the 10th Annual Haunted Forest organized by the Town of Aurora. PHOTO BY GLENN RODGER

By Brock Weir

It's time for all little ghouls and goblins to rest up; you have a busy week ahead!

The Town of Aurora is gearing up to transform Sheppard's Bush once again into Aurora's Haunted Forest, a fun ? and spooky ? family tradition marking its tenth anniversary this year.

The fun runs from 6 ? 9 p.m. at the Bush's Mary Street entrance with a trail of little thrills for the little boos and a trail of big thrills for the big kids and tweens, and, of course, the kids-at-heart.

Wristbands are on sale now at the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex and the Aurora Family Leisure Complex (AFLC) for \$5 per person. Parking is limited, and revellers are advised to park at the AFLC at 135 Industrial Parkway North to take advantage of a shuttle bus to Sheppard's Bush and indoor Halloween activities.

In conjunction with its milestone anniversary, Aurora's Haunted Forest was earlier this year named one of the Top 100 Festivals and Events in Ontario.

?The events that make the list are considered to be exceptional in the industry,? said Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora. ?Canadian Halloween celebrations have continued to get bigger and bigger every year. Halloween is now our country's biggest holiday besides Christmas in terms of consumer spending and public participation.

?Creating an event with this theme is unique considering the few alike events one can attend. Aurora's Haunted Forest is a community and volunteer-driven special event that provides ?spooktacular' excitement for all ages. Aurora's most anticipated Halloween event takes candy and costumes into a higher realm with an evening full of captivating thrills, chills, and festive fun.?

This year's event takes place rain or shine and over the past 10 years there has been more of the former than the latter. But despite ?every single year [experiencing] at least one element of terrible weather? the haunted forest goes from strength to strength.

?The event has seen everything from hail, rain and fog to snow and high winds,? said Ms. Ware. ?Despite this, event attendance still grows. The experience begins at the AFLC where event attendees can enjoy some crafts and games while they wait for their shuttle bus to Sheppard's Bush. At the bush, there is a festive trail designed for little goblins and another trail for those looking for a good Halloween scare.

?Both trails lead up to three decorated cabins, a bonfire, outdoor games, and Casper's Scare School where hair-raising ghost stories were brought to life. At this event, you might have some laughs, some screams, but most of all, a thrill that makes you feel alive. For every visitor that may shy away, hundreds more are intrigued by this must attend special event.?

This year, Aurora's Haunted Forest has been brought together with over 1,500 volunteer hours ? and counting ? racking up over 12,500 volunteer hours over the past decade, and they keep coming back for more. Volunteers, said Ms. Ware, particularly youth, come back year after year, and add take on more leadership roles.

?This event works with many community organizations to set up, make displays, tear down,? she said. ?You name it, they're up for it. Huge thanks is greatly given to the Aurora Scouts, Aurora Seniors Association, the Canadian Children's Theatre Company, Marquee Theatrical Productions, the Optimist Club of Aurora, and Aurora's Youth Engagement Committee.?

For more on this year's Haunted Forest, visit www.aurora.ca/hauntedforest.