

Saturday's Multicultural Festival goes with the grain



By Brock Weir

Steamed or fried, sticky or starchy, it is a part of everyone culture in some way or another.

It can be spiced to the nines, sweetened and rolled, or boiled into a creamy porridge, but wherever you go, rice is a staple and it is this humble grain which will form the centrepiece to the 2017 Aurora Multicultural Festival.

The Second Annual Multicultural Festival will take place at Town Park this Saturday, September 9, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., and is designed to celebrate Aurora's cultural heritage and diversity showcasing a variety of cultures from all around the world.

This year's festival will feature performances and demonstrations from a number of cultural communities which now call Aurora home, including Cameroonian, Italian, Korean, Scottish, Spanish, and a variety of South Asian cultures.

A common denominator of all these cultures? You guessed it.

"Rice is a global staple," says Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora. "All around the world, rice is a part of almost all cultures' cuisines. It is how each different culture has celebrated rice and they have done it uniquely in their own way. In the Spanish culture, they are known for their paellas. The Italian culture is known for their risottos, as well as the Indian culture in regards to their curries. There are a variety of ways rice is celebrated, but it is all coming back to that single grain. It is very symbolic of humanity."

To that end, there will be back-to-back hands-on food demonstrations throughout the day, including a chef who will be on side to teach people how to roll the perfect sushi roll. It is all part of a special drive to make this year's Multicultural Festival as "experiential" as possible, a key piece of feedback the Town received in surveys during, and community open houses following, their first annual Festival last September.

"The reviews we received immediately with the surveys at the event were positive and, since then, we also did two open houses," says Ms. Ware. "The information we gained from those two public open houses was that people wanted to have experiential opportunities. They wanted to experience cultural games, games they wouldn't necessarily experience, and they wanted a hands-on component as well. I feel we have been able to incorporate those two elements into this year's plan."

An important factor in making this all possible is a location change.

Last year's event was held at Ada Johnson Park in Aurora's northeast, but a move to Town Park this year allows for the cooking demonstrations to be inside at the adjacent historic Aurora Armoury.

Beyond the walls of the Armoury, Town Park will be a showcase of colour as cultural performers take the stage in a wide variety of costumes demonstrating an equal variety of dance, song and even fashion.

On stage will feature back-to-back performances of about 25 minutes each, including Spanish flamenco, a Korean fan dance, Italian dancers, a Japanese drumming, and a special emphasis on Cameroon, whose representatives will not only dance but feature a catwalk of North African fashion.

Offstage, there will be demonstrations of cultural sport ranging from jousting to cricket, along with showcases from a number of

community groups who will be steering family-friendly activities all related to the culture one can find in one's own family tree. ?The entertainment is stellar, it is motivating and it is vibrant, and energetic,? says Ms. Ware. ?The food component is a very unique angle, so those who do want to get a hands-on food experience, this will really meet their expectations. When was the last time you jousted, or tried doing the limbo? Have you ever had your hands on cricket equipment? This is a really experiential-focused event. ?We are most looking forward to seeing the community come together and seeing those who come out to the event expecting something else to just be really pleased with the result. It is nice to have an event in its infancy stage where it is just being developed and transformed. It will be nice to see and gauge people's reactions to the various components while we continue gathering feedback and building upon what worked well this year for next year.?

Aurora's Multicultural Festival will take place at Town Park this Saturday, September 9 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission is free and open to all ages, but nominal fees for food and beverages apply. For more information, visit www.aurora.ca/multiculturalfestival.