

Southlake to celebrate 'Centennial Summer' as engagement sessions continue

Southlake Regional Health Centre is planning a 'centennial summer' as it charts a roadmap for local healthcare into the next century.

The local hospital is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year and amid extensive public consultation on what the community would like to see from it in the decades ahead, they will mark the century that was with a number of events next month.

Among the free events in store for the community include the Southlake Artisan Market, which will take over Parking Lot P10 on Friday, August 9, from 4 to 8 p.m., and a Movie Under the Stars event, which will be hosted Tuesday, August 27, from 7 to 10 p.m. at the nearby Newmarket Seniors' Meeting Place.

The Market is billed to include an 'evening of community spirit and fun' featuring more than 20 local vendors offering a range of unique items. The Movie Under the Stars event will see 'If' unspooled for all ages.

Amidst this commemoration of a full century of leading-edge care, Southlake is busy taking 'snapshots' of what the next century might look like.

Throughout the first half of 2024, Southlake has held several community engagement sessions in the areas they serve, including one such event at the Aurora Armoury last month.

The next time the public can formally weigh in on the development of the hospital's new strategic plan is a virtual event planned for July 30 from 6.30 to 8.30 p.m.

'We want to develop what will hopefully shape the next 100 years of care in our communities, obviously recognizing that no plan can actually plan for a whole 100 years, but this is the start of developing that plan for the future,' says Angelica Cruz, Manager of Communications and Public Affairs for Southlake Regional Health Centre.

One of the certainties in the plan is the creation of more space to meet the needs of a growing community, and this will require a new campus.

'Southlake is bursting at the seams,' says Cruz. 'We know that we serve one of the largest-growing and aging populations in all of the country and we want to be able to bring that to the communities and hear directly from them about what they are hoping to see from their local hospital as we continue to grow. Access to care varies [between geographic areas] and we want to just make sure everyone is heard and everyone has the chance to really weigh in on what the future of Southlake looks like.'

'I think one of the things we have heard a lot recently is, at the heart of it, Southlake's strength is its people. We have really good people who are incredibly dedicated to providing leading-edge care, being compassionate, and providing the right services to patients when they need them and being right there by their side in making sure they have the care they need close to home.'

During the feedback sessions, one of the questions Southlake has asked the community is what they would like their families, friends and neighbours to be saying about the hospital 10 years from now. Feedback from the Aurora session indicated residents would like to see wait times reduced, a decrease in ambulance offload times 'so that patients have better access to care and emergency medical services can get back on the road faster,' and a 'diversity in care' to meet the diversity of the community as a whole.

Needs and challenges seen through an Aurora lens include a difficulty in accessing primary care and urgent care clinics, as 'limited alternatives have resulted in overcrowding' in the Emergency Department. More urgent care, home care and satellite resources are needed, feedback continued, as is a streamlined process from diagnosis to treatment.

Participating residents called on Southlake to expand partnerships with fitness and wellness programs, offer education in the school environment on ?general health and nutrition?, preventative education with community health fairs and other forms of outreach, support programs for seniors, including social opportunities, and to develop an education portal to serve the community in different situations, including knowing when to go to the Emergency Department.

Other calls include ?culturally appropriate? services for patients, increased education on navigating the Ontario Health System, the development of a ?system thinking approach focused on the aging population by expanding home care and health education to get ahead of the higher acuity curve,? and a focus on ?improving staff satisfaction to better the patient experience.?

For more information on the continuing community engagement, including how to take part in the upcoming virtual session, visit southlake.ca/about-southlake/planning-for-our-future. Residents can also share their feedback via email at strategy@southlake.ca.

For full details on how Southlake is celebrating its milestone 100th anniversary, visit southlake.ca/centennial-summer.

By Brock Weir