

## Spirit Walk uncovers the spooky side of Aurora life



**By Brock Weir**

David Heard wasn't one for spooky things growing up.

The mildest of peer pressures eventually left him an appreciation for the films of his childhood, but Mr. Heard has more recently embraced the spooky side of life beyond the movie screen; and helping others embrace it too on his annual Aurora Spirit Walk, an evening walking tour of the ghosts, spirits, and hauntings that hang around some of the storied neighbourhoods of Aurora.

'I was always afraid of those movies, but it's a genre people are drawn to,' he says. 'I think that's what the boomers who come on the tour like. They like that it is a creepy tour that makes you think and there is a plot to it.'

These plots come from the intricate web that has been spun through Aurora over the last 150 years, and even earlier than that in the Town's earliest days as Machell's Corners. Mr. Heard's own history is a part of this web as a descendant of some of Aurora's earliest settlers. It was while trying to unspin and find his own place in the web that his interest in the Town's past 'creepy or otherwise' was truly sparked.

'You find the skeletons in the closet and you choose to ignore those, but I found I had as reason to be proud being an Aurora resident,' he says. 'I would start telling others what I was finding and they would motivate me to keep searching and keep looking.'

It was people like Aurora's Citizen of the Year Ron Wallace who were key in pushing him along on this journey. Mr. Heard's pride of Aurora grew on each step of the journey and that is what he wants to impart to others.

When the tours take off through Downtown Aurora for the seventh year later this month, this year headquartered at Victoria Hall, they will have a distinctly local flavour. As this is Aurora's 150th anniversary, all proceeds from the tour will donate the Aurora Food Pantry.

If you have gone on the Spirit Walk before, Mr. Heard promises there will be something new for everyone as the 'story keeps evolving.'

'Every year we uncover new information and it is connected to the previous year in some way,' he says, illustrating an example from last year when hosts from TV's *Rescue Mediums* came to investigate some of Aurora's Most Haunted and encountered 'Annie', a spirit in the basement of the Filly & Firkin pub.

This 'Annie' was concluded to be Annie Dunning, whose family, it was later found out, owned land that is now the Aurora Pet

Cemetery, something which has become something of a cause celebre for local historians over the last 12 months.?

?It is almost as if I am on a journey and I keep searching for answers,? he adds, noting people continually come to him with new stories of spooky sites and creepy coincidences. ?The more I search, the more I meet new people and that has to be the greatest gift of doing the Spirit Walk.

?One of the things I do promise is confidentiality. Some people are nervous about sharing these stories because they don't want to be called ?crazy'. I say to them, ?You're not crazy. Something interesting happened and you want to share it.' I let them make the guidelines on how it is shared.?

It is important that people make up their own minds on these tours, he adds. Keeping an open mind is paramount, along with respect for the community and people who live here ? today, and perhaps still lingering. Sometimes people are more curious than scared if they observe or encounter something spooky happening in their own homes or their businesses, but it is something that can be explored, ignored, or truly embraced, says Mr. Heard.

?Some say spirits are entities of energy that can come and go as they please. Sometimes we call them guardian angels sorting out the rite of passage. There are others from days gone by that are stuck. There could be a reason why they can't move on, and sometimes it is just a matter of being convinced to move on. Some people have told me they know there is somebody in their house and they are happy ? it is an extra guest who doesn't eat food!

?When people finish the tour, they walk away and they feel like they have experienced something in the community. They have got to share something, enjoy fresh air, meet new people, meet their neighbours from across town, and they got to find out a little about their history and get creeped out without watching a slasher film.

?You might turn that off halfway through, but I have never had somebody not finish a tour!?