

Teens to showcase forward-thinking creativity at Youth Innovation Fair

By Brock Weir

Teens from across Aurora are putting the finishing touches on what just might be their game changer for next Wednesday's inaugural Youth Innovation Summit.

Hosted by the Town as part of Canada 150 Commemorations, it is an event to showcase, according to Youth Coordinator Julie Stephenson, "How innovative this generation of youth really is."

"I think we have seen a lot of changes and developments over the last few years, especially in technology fields, but also just with innovation in general," she says. "We wanted an opportunity for the community to see the creativity and innovation of this age in Aurora."

Planning for the Youth Innovation Fair began earlier this year when the Town began brainstorming ways to mark the Canada 150 Celebration. Two of the four key pillars of Canada 150 are "youth" and "innovation" and this seemed like the perfect way to bring those two pillars together.

"We were looking at ways we could celebrate Aurora in this year, along with how we bring in youth, get them involved and get them engaged," says Ms. Stephenson. "It started out with looking out into our community and seeing what youth are doing. If you really take a look at what kids are doing, not only in school but also outside of school, a lot of them are really interested in how to create different alternative methods of getting things done, or how to tinker with something that already exists in order to make it more efficient or more helpful to people."

"We wanted to be really inclusive in this event and leave it open and have as many youth as possible participating."

That is exactly how things unfolded.

Since they came up with the idea, organizers have been hard at work promoting the event within schools and through social media. Partnered with both the York Region District School Board as well as the York Catholic District School Board, they have made presentations in schools to hear some of their ideas, discuss some of their own innovative projects, and stimulate some brainstorming discussions on just what they might be able to bring to the fair.

Now, it's a matter of simply looking forward to what's ultimately going to come through their doors.

"We do want to leave it as open as possible and not give anyone too strict a guideline, so we have left it open to the youth and what they come up with," says Ms. Stephenson. "We have given them the option to submit an idea, a prototype, or even a performance of an idea. We have left the category in terms of what they can submit very open as well. We have some entries that are very clearly based in the environment, but we also have some entries based in technology, home, and building projects as well."

"As for how they display that idea, we have given them a lot of open possibilities. As long as you can get your idea or your innovative idea across to our judging panel and our community then that is what we want to see. We have some kids who have actually built their product, but we have some kids who have found creative ways to showcase it at the actual fair."

Taking a close look at each of the individual innovations will be a judging panel including Mayor Geoff Dawe among others and honours will be taken home for Most Innovative, along with honourable mentions in the categories of Environmentally Friendly and Community Leadership.

"I am really looking forward to hearing the youth talk about their ideas," says Ms. Stephenson. "Right now we have the bare bones of their ideas from their applications, but I am really excited to hear the passion and the creativity that comes out when they get to talk about them and share them with the community. On the other side of that, I am really excited to hear the community respond to their ideas."

"You students are going to go through a lot of revisions until you're at a point where you market the product and are really putting it to use, but starting at the community level of introducing the idea and meeting people who can challenge you on those ideas is really important. I hope students take that experience away and maybe leave inspired to keep going with this experience? and maybe do some really amazing things in the future."

Aurora's Inaugural Youth innovation Fair will take place at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex (135 Industrial Parkway North) on Wednesday, November 15, from 6 - 9 p.m. and is open to the public.