

Bonfire Night a blast at local fairgrounds

By Mike Pickford

Not even icy-cold temperatures that dropped dangerously close to freezing were enough to deter approximately 400 area residents from celebrating Bonfire Night in style this past weekend.

Held at the Orangeville Agricultural Society Event Centre last Saturday (Nov. 4), the second annual event took the community by storm as local residents Sharon Edmonds and Elaine Capes planned a full afternoon's worth of activities. Recognized as the only official event of its kind in Ontario (they do celebrate the 'holiday' in Atlantic Canada), Bonfire Night pays homage to the failed Gunpowder Plot of 1605, which saw British rebel Guy Fawkes and a group of 12 other men attempt to blow up the British Houses of Parliament and assassinate the royal family.

Much of the history surrounding the origins of the event has been lost over time and today, over in the UK, Bonfire Night is mostly seen as an occasion to get together with family and friends and enjoy a fun-filled evening. Having grown up loving Bonfire Night while living in the UK, Ms. Edmonds is eager to spread the joy in Dufferin County.

'Bonfire Night is always one of the biggest nights of the year in the UK, it's brilliant,' Sharon told the Free Press. 'I really want to bring that sense of community, that sense of camaraderie that embodies Bonfire Night here to Dufferin County. We had a great time last year with our first annual event and even more so this year. It was a bit cold outside, but we had some fantastic feedback from those in attendance.'

While there were lots of locals on hand learning about Guy Fawkes, the Gunpowder Plot and British history, there was a definitive British contingent in attendance too, some of whom had traveled from places such as London, Burlington and Cobourg to be there. Peter Jacobs made the relatively short trip up Highway 10 from Brampton to check the event out and he did not leave disappointed. 'The bonfire was the thing that got me, it was amazing. It definitely was a cold day, but once you got around that fire you were warm and toasty in no time,' Mr. Jacobs said.

One of the children in attendance spoke of her experience making her very own straw Guy Fawkes effigy and then participating in a marching parade down to the bonfire, where she placed her Guy to burn.

'It was fun. I liked that I could put it on the fire and watch it (burn),' little Emily said.

And looking ahead to next year, Ms. Capes said there would be some notable changes made in an attempt to entice even more people to come out.

'The big thing we're looking at doing next year is making this more of an indoor event. We're going to hire a band and make sure there's lots to do inside, just in case we have a bitter day like we did on Saturday,' Elaine said. 'We'll still have the bonfire and the fireworks, so there will be things outside. But the crafts and storytelling? It would make sense to focus more on an indoor location.' Either way, Bonfire Night will be back again in Orangeville in 2018; that much Ms. Edmonds would guarantee.

'The overwhelming support we've had from people in this community and people from outside of the community just shows that there are people who really want this event to succeed,' Sharon said. 'It is a bit different from anything else that goes on in Canada. Fireworks in November raises a few eyebrows for Canadians, but I can really see this taking off in a big way over the next couple of years. We're here every step of the way. I said it last year and I'll say it again, we want Orangeville to be known for Bonfire Night.' She concluded, 'We're getting there, it's been a fun couple of years. We just need to continue getting our message out there to the community and letting them know how much fun Bonfire Night can be.'