

Annual Fire and Ice Festival to return with ice carving, fire dancers

Written By Joshua Drakes

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

The vibrant Fire and Ice Festival will return on Jan. 31 and will run through Feb. 1 at the Alton Mill Arts Centre.

The festival has been held annually for more than 15 years and was developed to bring people to the historic mill during the winter months while highlighting local artists and outdoor recreation.

Sarah Sansom, the special events and marketing manager for the Alton Mill Arts Centre, said that the event has never sat still, always evolving and growing from its roots as a small hockey tournament.

"This is our 16th annual Fire and Ice Festival, but it originated as a sort of hockey tournament," she said. "Originally, it was a fundraiser for the Mill Pond rehabilitation. So it was called The Mill Pond classic, and they'd get together, just a bunch of hockey teams, some ex-NHL veterans, and some local families and local people, and they would do it as a hockey tournament. That's sort of where it got its roots, and it kind of continued to grow from there."

The event is now spread across the mill property and the surrounding grounds. Outdoor events are plentiful and promise something for everyone, according to Sansom.

"You've got the skating and the sledding and the s'mores and the ice carving, and we have a big activation event happening outside," Sansom said. "So there's some great large-scale family games, some hockey shooting accuracy challenges, giant chess games, and all sorts of things set up outside. There's also food trucks, fire dancers, you name it."

"All the fun things that you would want at a festival are happening here," she added.

There's just as much happening inside as outside as well. For those who might get too cold or would rather stay warm throughout the evening, Sansom said that you're covered.

"Inside, we have art vendors set up throughout the building," she said. "All the artists that have studios at the Alton Mill are on site. You get to see the artists, meet them, talk to them. We also have live music happening indoors, including a drumming circle."

Sansom continued, "We also have art shows, a hot stove lounge, where you can get something nice and warm to warm you up, and there's complimentary kids' craft there all day."

In addition to indoor and outdoor activities, there will be plenty of performers on site, offering live music and entertainment.

The festival's lineup also features a range of performers and community partners both inside and out. Indoors, guests can take in live music from Larry Kurtz on Saturday and Musical Munchkins, alongside family-friendly activities hosted by Theatre Orangeville.

The Stoney Lonesome bluegrass band performance and a roster of six stand-up comedians anchor the 19-plus Hot Mic comedy and concert night, while Sleeman & Sons of Guelph will be on site offering whiskey tastings.

The biggest event of the weekend is the dramatically titled "The Big Burn!" and it will be taking ice sculpting to the next level.

"The big burn is a sculptural piece," Sansom said. "We have a couple of artists that come together, and they build this sculptural piece, and they create a show that goes with it, so an audio and a light show that kind of goes around this piece, and it all tells a

story. At 6:30 p.m., it gets lit, and there's this evolution of the sculpture that happens with the burn... It's more than a big bonfire, it's so much more. It's a spectacle.?

In the past, the burn has featured sculptures such as a dragon whose wings spread as the ice melts, among other incredible works by local artists. The project for 2026 is a secret and will be revealed only on the day of the festival, when the fires are lit.

To make such incredible work possible, Sansom said the festival relies on local volunteers and sponsors, with more needed at all times.

?We want to give a huge thank you to the Town of Caledon and to all of the sponsors that help make this event possible; we could not do it without them,? she said. ?To anyone who is interested in participating in the event, we are still accepting volunteers.?

?For businesses that are wondering about how they might be able to get involved, even if it's not for this year, but for next, we are always open to working with new partners and offering new elements.?

With so many events loaded into one weekend, the Alton Mill Fire and Ice Festival promises to light the fires of excitement, bringing local vendors, food, and entertainment to the small community, with only bigger plans for next year.

For more information, including ticket prices and volunteering, visit <https://www.altonmill.ca/fire-and-ice>.