

Alton Mill's Spring Open House set for this weekend

By Constance Scrafield

There is lots of news at the Alton Mill Arts Centre in the village of Alton. Much of it will constitute what is happening at the annual Spring Open House over this weekend, Saturday, April 30 and Sunday, May 1.

With only a hint about one of the new additions to the Mill, the Citizen nevertheless had a conversation with Chef Martin Kouprie who is both the new General Manager of the Mill and making plans for the Alton Mill's new restaurant, set to be installed in the Pond Gallery upstairs.

'We've gone ahead and got our liquor license this week,' he told us. 'That will help to move the approval for the restaurant along. And it means we can sell drinks at the Open House this weekend [and] help to add a casual air.'

Chef Kouprie went on to outline the five main attractions of the upcoming weekend at the Alton Mill.

The Spring Open House is an annual signature event at the Mill, a celebration of the spring with the thrill of new life that helps one forget the rigours of winter. The joy of new grass and the flush of fresh blooms in the gardens and through the woods are lovely to see.

A walk up the path in the woods heading up a slight incline from the Mill leads to a fabulous dry stone installation titled The Wave. That is precisely what it looks like: an easy (on the eyes) form flowing in as liquid an image as stone could manage.

Dry stone wall artisan Doug Bell will be onsite this weekend to demonstrate how to repair such a stone wall by hand. Donations for the Canada Dry Stone Wall Association would be appreciated but the demonstration is freely given.

There are works of art all around the outside of the Mill and worth a stroll to see them at any time.

Celtic Artist and Shamanic Practitioner CJ Sheldon is highlighting her talent as a Tarot or Soul Symbol Reader. For the weekend, walk-ins are accepted to learn how CJ interprets what the cards say as well as what she understands that comes from the person for whom the cards are being read. It is a fascinating and sometimes life-changing experience.

Andrew Welch, author of Our Second Chance is on deck this weekend to talk about his book which is the sequel to his first book The Value Crisis. In them, he explains the 'heart of the value crisis that prevents us from taking the action so urgently needed.'

Seeing the world from a very different perspective, Mr. Welch's message is about solutions that work. He is speaking in the Millrace Room on Saturday at 2:00 p.m.

The Competition Event Vol. 1, presented by Sam King and the Alton Mill Arts Centre, gives the audience the chance to watch 12 artists compete in a live painting session and join the adjudicators in choosing the winners.

Tickets are available online at Eventbrite or Facebook. The Competition will take place in the Millrace Room on Sunday, May 1, starting at 1:00 p.m.

'I've been getting ready for this weekend,' said Martin Kouprie, 'doing a little bit of shopping, I bought some Canadian wine, some economically-priced so as not to charge too much. We want this to be a nice weekend and we're looking to keep the costs down.'

Chef Kouprie has 'only lived up here [in the country not far from Alton] for six years. I thought there would be an opportunity for me.'

'I'm so thankful that I'm up here,' he went on to say.

Martin Koupric is a chef by training, commenting, 'I've been cooking longer than I've done anything else.'

His training was primarily acquired by working for the best chefs, back in the day when they had a trial system, telling us that chefs don't do that anymore. Many times they hired an employee on merit.

Chef Koupric went to Humber College to complete his credentials by achieving his Certificate Chef de Cuisine (CCC).

For 20 years, his Toronto restaurant Pangia was located at Bay and Bloor.

The Chef's background is wine, 'The Alton Mill is about the local experience, to experience the terroir.'

The two Canadian wines he purchased are Angel's Gate Chardonnay and wine by Speck Brothers.

'Plus a rosé, a Crémant from France.'

During the weekend there will be choices from charcuterie, cheese and fruit, vegetables with dips and some wine. COVID protocols dictate that food comes pre-packaged, so it will be kept simple and low cost to offer food and drink as a way to bring everyone in.

Opening a restaurant is a leap of faith, very hard work with few guarantees.

In answer to our inquiry as to what keeps him at it, Chef Koupric explained, 'It's a passion of mine ' I love the pressure ' I love creating. We'll be making our own fermented sausage, professional sausage making. We have been given permission (OCO) to make cheese.

'The success lies with creativity,' he said, 'like risotto ' every time I make it, I think I made it a little bit better.'

Plans for the restaurant will try for about 60 seats inside and 40 on the patio. A hundred, so we were told, is the magic number.

'Having a pleasant environment and not feel rushed, be relaxed enough to enjoy yourself,' is his ideal. 'Keep a concise menu that will change with the season: three specials on the daily menu, imported wines and hams you can't get here.'

To tempt visitors to come over this Spring Open House weekend, Chef Koupric described the Alton Mill as a unique destination 'where you won't get anywhere else. You're brought to another place and another world, when people do things with their hands.'

He said, 'All the old lessons from our forefathers and we take them and make the best in the new world.'

For all the information about the Alton Mill Arts Centre and the Open House weekend go to www.altonmill.ca