

Hundreds celebrated Guy Fawkes in Orangeville

By Mike Pickford

A healthy crowd of close to 500 people made their way to the Orangeville Fairgrounds last Saturday night to experience the 'one of a kind' first-ever Guy Fawkes Bonfire Night Celebration.

Recognized as the only official event of its kind in Ontario, Bonfire Night, as it is affectionately known across the pond in the U.K., 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 King James I.

Failing in their attempt, Fawkes was caught at the scene of the plot and subsequently charged with high treason. He was hung, drawn and quartered for his part in the plot. On the night the Gunpowder Plot was foiled 'Nov. 5' bonfires were set alight across Britain to celebrate the safety of King James.

Bringing the annual event to life in Canada following more than 12 months of planning and preparation, local residents Elaine Capes and Sharon Edmonds were 'delighted' with the turnout and overall response their Bonfire Celebration received.

'We were completely blown away by just how many people we had out on the day,' Capes told the Citizen. 'We had 250 tickets sold the day of and another 240 coming through the gates over the course of the event, so this was huge.'

Starting at 4 p.m. and running until 8 p.m., those in attendance were treated to a large bonfire and professional fireworks display over the course of the evening. While there were many locals on hand at the celebration, there were many others that had traveled a fair distance to experience the unique event.

Among those was Mississauga resident Shahab Peer. After watching the movie *V for Vendetta* 'a loosely-based modern take on the Gunpowder Plot' a number of years ago, Peer had developed an interest in the history behind Guy Fawkes and Bonfire Night. He'd previously spent several years searching for public parties and celebrations on the big night to no avail.

'I was so excited when I found out about this event, I knew right away that I wanted to come and check it out,' Peer, dressed in a traditional Guy Fawkes costume complete with mask, told the Citizen. 'This was something that resonated with me after watching the movie and so I was interested in seeing what the event is all about.'

British citizen Duncan Terry traveled from Cobourg with his wife and three kids in an attempt to teach them a little bit about English culture and history.

'Bonfire Night is a completely mystery to my family because they didn't grow up with it like I did,' Terry said. 'I just remember the nights stood around the fire talking with your neighbours and just having fun. It was great. This was well worth the trip 'it was just like being back in the U.K. You've got the big bonfire, friendly people and some fireworks. It was a great night.'

Cates and Edmonds are already planning for next year's event, with a date of Nov. 4 already pencilled in for the second-annual Guy Fawkes Bonfire Night Celebration.

'Put it on your calendars,' Edmonds said. 'We're already planning for next year. We're taking in all the feedback we've received and we're going to do what we can to make this bigger and better next year.'

'We said it before and we'll say it again, this is what we want Orangeville to be known for,' she added. 'Judging by the number of people we had out for our very first year, there's a real want there for this type of celebration. As long as there is a want, we're going to keep on putting it together. Watch out for next year 'It's going to be quite the party.'



Mississauga resident Shahab Peer adopted the persona of Guy Fawkes at the first Guy Fawkes Bonfire Night Celebration, which took place at the Orangeville Fairgrounds last weekend. Photo by Mike Pickford