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Export date: Thu Mar 28 21:40:35 2024 / +0000 GMT

Mural project will bring together your vision of your community



By Brock Weir

Ted Hamer likens Canada to ?a big village.?

If the muralist were to translate this into his medium of choice, you would likely see depictions of different members of the community, perhaps even multigenerational, all working together towards a common goal.

But this isn't Mr. Hamer's story, this is your story, and he wants to hear from you about ?What makes Canada Great?? Your ideas will be incorporated into a new outdoor art installation that will be created over the summer months and, if all goes according to plan, will become a focal point outside the Aurora Cultural Centre.

Mr. Hamer is leading the Centre's ?Canada 150 Milestone Murals? project. A multidisciplinary artist based in Toronto, he joined the team at the Aurora Cultural Centre earlier this month, taking the role of Community Arts Facilitator.

The Mural Project officially launched this week thanks to a Federal cash infusion announced by Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MP Leona Alleslev and you will have the opportunity to weigh in on that all-important question at this weekend's Canada Day Festivities, as well as two upcoming Community Consultations at the Aurora Cultural Centre on July 13 and August 3.

?What I am asking is for people to share their story,? says Mr. Hamer. ?Instead of coming up with one cohesive image, I want people to tell their story of what makes Canada great. It could be a memory they have of Canada, of their lives in the country, but we will have these handouts where they can write or draw anything they want. From their ideas we will create a tapestry instead of a single image.?

As he delves deeper into the project, he says he is excited to facilitate a mural project such as this as it is a piece of public art in which the community can really take ownership.

While many artists like to focus on the work they create in their own studio and perfect their craft almost in insolation, Mr. Hamer says in mural-making you are ?confronted with the public daily or hourly.?

?It is a learning process and also an opportunity where the community can come together and create a shared vision of what they want on their walls,? he says. ?It is the public's voice. Murals are a public gallery. There are areas in the world where you can just walk around for hours and every wall is different, every wall is a different story. It is a gallery for the public and the world.?

With little over three weeks on the job, Mr. Hamer says he is familiarizing himself with the Aurora experience. So far, he and the Cultural Centre have developed four themes that have been specified in the Federal grant, and they focus on Truth & Reconciliation, Nature & The Environment, Where We Are Today, and Bright Future Ahead.

The main threads of the project, they have left the possibilities very open-ended.

Asked what his own idea of Canada is, Mr. Hamer says he sees the nation as ?a land where we break down barriers between genders, sexualities, classes and whatnot.?

?I have travelled around the world a lot and I have seen areas where people are separated and alone,? he says. ?We are kind of all condensed around the border and the lakes and we seem to have formed stronger communities. My image of Canada is kind of a big village.?

Keeping this in mind, he is also cognizant of the fact Canada 150 is not seen in all quarters as a unifying celebration. He says he has struggled with the idea that so much money is being put into these kinds of events when there are communities in need, particularly ?the Native population, which is in desperate need of improvement by the Government.?
?I see this as almost an olive branch of where do we go from here? Personally with the project I would like some native voices in it and they can speak to this project any way that they feel fit. I would like it to be a discussion. I don't want to censor images and I want it to really help us move forward. There are some serious questions to be raised and I think a serious discussion is in order.
?I hope they take away a creative learning experience and to see that art doesn't have to be in a house in a room. You can make it in public, you can display it in public, you can work together on a piece and the energy and spontaneity that comes out in mural making is just incredible and that is what I want people to see. I want them to come away with a vision of their community they are a part of.?

Ideas for the Milestone Mural will be taken at Party in the Park this Friday, June 30, from 4 ? 8 p.m. at Town Park. Community consultations will be held at the Aurora Cultural Centre on Thursday, June 13 from 3 ? 6 p.m., and again on Thursday, August 3 at the same time.