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York University partners with Library on Scholars? Hub



By Brock Weir

Aurora's post-secondary presence is set to get a boost this fall in a new partnership between York University and the Aurora Public Library.

On Monday, September 23, York University and the Aurora Public Library (APL) will launch The York University Scholars' Hub, a new pilot project bringing together York University professors with locally based alumni and members of the public alike for engaging discussion on current issues.

The series will launch with Guests and Hosts Discuss Responsibilities to Wampums, Treaties and Relationships with Indigenous Researcher and Professor Dr. Ruth Koleszar-Green.

?The relationships between the colonial governments and Indigenous Peoples has been and continues to be fraught with misunderstandings and problematic legislation,? says the partnership. ?These mechanisms of colonial control have caused both political and personal struggle for both hosts (Indigenous Nations and people) and Guests (those that have entered into relation since 1534). In moving forward, we need to look holistically at where we have been and reimagine relationships based on peace, friendship and mutual respect.?

The partnership between York University and APL came out of ongoing dialogue between Mayor Tom Mrakas and APL CEO Bruce Gorman with different post-secondary partners, according to Reccia Mandelcorn, Manager of Community Collaboration with APL.

Ms. Mandelcorn says York University was looking for ways of engaging the community and expressed interest in using the Library's living room space for a pilot project such as this.

?We decided we would try this as a pilot, then the next question was, who would we be bringing in to speak,? says Ms. Mandelcorn. ?York was really gracious and sent a whole list of subject areas, along with the professors who taught them. Not everyone, of course, would necessarily be willing to come, but we got to look through the list and select someone ? and here we are, so excited!

?This is such an honour, really, to host a university-level lecture here.?

While Ms. Mandelcorn was presented with a list of options, as soon as she skimmed the list, she said she knew the perfect combination to get the ball rolling.

?We have been really wanting to bring in some conversations on Indigenous studies because our community is asking for it,? she says. ?It shouldn't be a checklist from Truth & Reconciliation, but an ongoing conversation and education piece. When I saw Dr. Ruth Koleszar-Green, who was speaking on that subject, teaching that subject, I was really excited; She has won the York University Presidents' Award for excellence in teaching for 2018, and the reviews of her speaking have huge acclaim. I said, ?I want this professor and I am not giving you a second choice because she is the one that I want.' Luckily we got her and we left the subject matter and the lecture of what she wanted to bring to the conversation. The actual topic was decided by Dr. Ruth.

?York University left it to us and to Dr. Ruth to be able to decide what it would be and I think from the programming we have done in the past? people are really interested in our relationships, our historical relationships, and our relationships with current legislation, how treaties are interpreted, misunderstandings and going through in a positive way. When she said this is something she would like to speak on, my inclination is if somebody has passion with what they would like to speak, this is where we go.

?The other thing I was very much interested in, is rather than just being an academic, Dr. Ruth is actually an activist in her community, so she is an advisor to the office of the president on Indigenous initiatives at York and she does a lot of community activism. It is not just speaking and lecturing from a textbook, it is somebody who is actually in the community doing work and I thought this would bring a new and exciting energy to her talk.?

While the inaugural discussion is still about a month and a half away, Ms. Mandelcorn says she is hoping the conversation will not simply be a look backwards at history and the problems that have taken place, but a forward-looking dialogue on problem-solving.

?There were so many injustices that were done and continue to be done, from my perspective, that I think we need to come to an understanding and work towards a positive relationship. I think that is where she is going to be coming from,? she says. ?She wants to talk about moving forward and re-imagining relationships based on peace, friendship and mutual respect. I think that is the only way people can really rectify injustices of the past: acknowledge what was there and then to look for solutions so it doesn't happen again ? and we look forward in a positive way.

?Everybody wants to know how to make it better. We acknowledge the problems of the past, but so many people feel so ill-equipped. Where do I fit in? Where do I fit in with Truth and Reconciliation? What can we do? I think a conversation about re-imagining new relationships moving forward gives people maybe a positive spin and a personal power on being able to make things better for future generations.?

For more information on Guests & Hosts Discuss Responsibilities to Wampums, Treaties and Relationships, visit alumniandfriends.yorku.ca/apl-scholars-hub. The discussion will take place at the Aurora Public Library on Monday, September 23, from 7 ? 8.30 p.m.