

A healthy community begins with its leadership: Anti-Black Racism Team member



A healthy community begins at the top, and its leaders need to work together to foster it.

So says Phiona Durrant, a local business owner who was appointed by Council last week as a member of Aurora's newly-established Anti-Black Racism and Anti-Racism Task Force.

After her appointment was announced on Wednesday, Ms. Durrant said on social media that she intended on 'putting in the work to see change, to be a voice and not an echo,' but this is a mantra she has followed since moving to Aurora more than a decade ago.

Following a Solidarity March up Yonge Street to Town Park in conjunction with the Black Lives Matter movement after the murder of George Floyd, Ms. Durrant has been hard at work shining a light on Aurora's Black community. These efforts include the establishment of a Facebook group 'Aurora Black Community' with the mission statement of fostering an 'empowering environment that provides a connecting bridge for multiculturalism in Aurora and surrounding areas through music, food, events, education and resources.'

It is, she says, designed to be a 'safe space' for everyone in the community who 'supports our vision for unity and being a fundamental influence in our community.'

'Actions and intentional conversations about implicit bias and racism aimed at the Black community and other minority groups have been taking place long before the tragedies of our most recent victims. It is important for our community to be resourceful and get educated on how to effectively address all forms of racism towards any group, especially minorities.'

'The reception has been awesome,' says Ms. Durrant of the first few months of the group. 'I have been able to meet Black people I didn't even know lived in Aurora.'

One of the first things she posted was an essay on the topic of 'I'm not in lack because I'm Black, or my Black is not the hindrance of my success.'

'When writing it, I felt nervous because if I am not singing the same tune as everybody, they're going to say I am 'whitewashed' because I am not 'cursing' White people,' she says. 'Too many of the Black people I have met sit back and we say nothing is going to change, it is just what it is, and we don't participate. I always say to my Black family and friends, 'Show up or shut up.' We can't

make a difference by saying nothing is going to change. Do what you can.?

Ms. Durrant has been 'showing up' at Town Hall frequently over the past year, speaking out on issues close to her heart.

This past September, she made a delegation to Council on the subject of Black Lives Matter to ask lawmakers what they were doing to foster a 'healthy community.'?

'I mean, healthy in relationships,' she says. 'I have been in business for more than 13 years, so if I am with staff and there is constant conflict, we're always going to spend more time on this than serving our clients. If Council is having conflicts dealing with issues between one another, it takes away from the time we spend in the community and on the work that needs to be done. As much as a Council might say 'I am fighting on behalf of the people,' it is how it is done. If it is not healthy, and it is bringing one another down, and it is causing more division, then it isn't helping us.

'For me, it is respect. The best thing we can have in our community is respect. I am a Black person, I run a business here in Aurora that is dominantly White. I am very cautious that I would even use the word 'support Black business.' I don't want to support a Black business just because it is Black. I want to support it because the respect is there and I am getting the respect I am there for and the customer service is on point. I don't just want you to come because it is a Black business, but is this business catering to what I need? We just need to be respectful. I found this was missing in the community. It caused a lot of health issues ' people are just arguing and not being considerate of one another.'?

Aurora's Anti-Black Racism & Anti-Racism Task Force will begin meetings this month to 'develop and discuss strategies to eliminate all racism in our community and in the Municipal Corporation.' In addition to Ms. Durrant, the Committee will include Noor El-Dassouki, Keenan Hull, Mae Khamissa, Mark Lewis, Tricia Wright, and Councillor Harold Kim.

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