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New downtown mural is a celebration of diversity and inclusion

Many hands from many backgrounds have helped stitch the tapestry that is modern-day Canada, and this collaborative effort is now represented on a new mural in Aurora's downtown core.

Aurora's new Diversity and Inclusion mural, designed by the Moonlight Mural Collective, was dedicated last Wednesday afternoon by Mayor Tom Mrakas before a host of dignitaries, including incumbent and aspiring Council members, as well as businesses and individuals who helped support the mural's development.

?In October of 2020, Councillor Harold Kim brought forward a motion to Town Council and Aurora Town Council approved that motion and directed staff to create a mural that raises awareness of diversity and inclusion, and creatively expresses how Canadians from diverse backgrounds have contributed to the building of Canada and Aurora,? said Mayor Mrakas. ?Commissioned by the Town of Aurora and produced by the Moonlight Murals Collective, today's unveiling is the culmination of that work.

?This mural speaks to how prosperous communities are created by people coming together to weave different identities and traditions into something beautiful. We are fortunate to have this mural located here in our downtown core to convey the message that as a municipality we value the many cultures and languages and groups that call the Town of Aurora home. Throughout the process of creating the mural, the Town engaged with numerous groups, including the Anti-Black Racism and Anti-Racism Task Force which formed a subcommittee to assist on the project. Along with the recently unveiled mural by local artist Vicki Carruthers just down the street from here, these two murals are just the beginning of what we hope will be many more to beautify Aurora in the coming months and years.?

Originally slated to be placed on a building at Yonge and Wellington, the mural eventually found a home on Yonge Street, just south of Church Street, on a building wall that shares space with realtor Lenard Lind. Lind's support of the project, along with the ?generous support? of Desjardins Insurance and Smart Centres were also recognized by the Town.

?It is something to say you want to enrich the lives of communities and it's something else to really do something and realize projects,? said Guy Cormier, President & CEO of Desjardins Group, at last week's dedication. I really feel today in having this opportunity to be with you and to see and look at this mural and this teamwork that the city, the partners, Desjardins, the artists, the group?.decided we wanted to do something positively in our society and our community to just be more diverse, inclusive. That's who we are as Desjardins.?

When first approved by Council, the Moonlight Mural Collective, a collective of Iranian-born artists Ghazaleh Rastgar, Melika Saeea and Yasaman Mehrsa, who describe themselves as immigrants who moved to Canada at an older age, said they wanted to ?portray the idea of Canadians of all backgrounds, coming together in order to build and produce beauty together by way of sewing a quilt.?

?We depict a number of different coloured hands who are putting together a beautiful quilt made up of a variety of textiles with different designs and motifs,? they said. ?The different coloured hands suggesting different races and the textiles are traditional prints from a variety of cultures and backgrounds. As the city aims to raise awareness about the significant achievements made by diverse individuals from Canada's past and present, we find this theme very fitting while not isolating one person [or] group. Our message includes everyone and is a strong message of unity. We are all Canadians while being from around the world and we are always striving to better ourselves, our communities and our hometown.

?The message this represents means a lot to us, as immigrant artists. Throughout our time in Canada, specifically the GTA, we have been able to not only build better lives for ourselves, but have also got to collaborate and work with people from a variety of backgrounds in order to make the city more beautiful. We find that we are constantly inspired by people from different cultures and love the fact that we can also inspire others by what we bring into communities by way of art. We have also noticed that Aurora includes a large community of Iranians and as Iranian artists, it would be great for us to contribute to this community in Aurora.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter