

## Aurora Black Community Association's Black History Programs splash into April



The Aurora Black Community Association's popular Breaking Barriers Swimming program, I Can Swim, returned to Aurora Family Leisure Complex on Saturday, April 4, kicking off the latest season of instruction designed to "create safe, empowering spaces in aquatics for Black families in our community, both education and children."

Running on select dates through May 30, it's the latest initiative to come forward from the Aurora Black Community Association (ABC) as they continue their Black History Month programs well beyond February.

"The I Can Swim program, we call it ICS, was created to break generational barriers around swimming, promote water safety, and build long-time wellness," says ABC Founder and President Phiona Durrant. "One of the things we love and are grateful for is the partnership with the Town. It's through partnership like this that can help families to gain confidence in water while strengthening representation aquatics."

"The program is full, with those on the waiting list to still be a part of this breaking barrier-free swimming program."

Durrant describes the I Can Swim initiative as a "critical part of life skills and safety" and notes the partnership with the Town has allowed for 20 additional families still on the wait list to participate this spring.

"This is intentional community-building and investment. It's about closing access gaps, reducing isolation, building safer communities, saving lives, promoting mental wellness, and strengthening diverse family involvement."

Last week, Durrant updated Council on the ABC's activities.

Delegating to the March 31 meeting, Durrant reflected on the success of February's Black History Month Flag Raising Ceremony and subsequent Gala while looking firmly to the future.

"Do we believe that racism still exists even in communities like Aurora? Do we believe that barriers can still exist even if we're not intentional? Do we believe that building an inclusive community requires all of us? How we answer these questions shapes the kind of community we build," said Durrant. "ABC has evolved into a pivotal force for economic and social advancement in our Town. Our work benefits everyone. It's grounded in Black leadership and representation that builds to include everyone across all cultures. We amplify Black voices and issues, which cultures build connection and create a space where people feel [belonging]."

"We uplift, we invest and we support community, whether it's initiatives that advance the community as a whole by providing

whether it's grant to improve our youth and entrepreneurs, or things that just improve the lives of everyday life in Aurora?. It's not just the voices we advocate for; we put financial investment behind the work, and so when you invest in us, like you've done this Black History [Month], this is the results that we're providing. Real change requires both the advocacy and the investment. We've seen great collaboration, and we work with the Sports Hall of Fame. We did not just nominate or pay and sponsor just people that represent our colour, because investment is about beyond just us. It's about the community.?

At the end of the day, it's all about the citizens of Aurora as a whole, said Durrant, and these programs, as exemplified by fully-booked cooking classes at the Aurora Public Library, only bring community together.

?Inclusion does not include exclusion. It's about everyone in our community. We are also proud of the growth that we see,? Durrant continued. ?We're constantly building and growing and evolving. When you put support behind us, it is growth. When we did the Black History program Backpack First Back to School, we had 309 people or more registered, 209 attended. This was not a charity event. It was an event to bring our community together because this is strategic to anti-Black racism. This is a strategic and inclusive Town, and this is how we help you, our Town, to live out your vision statement and a mission to make this a place where everyone feels [they] belong and call home.

??When the world is silent,' Malala says, ?one's voice can become powerful.' In this community, it's not about you, and it's not about me. It's about the community we're creating. It's about what true inclusion empowerment is.?

Kudos were returned by Mayor Tom Mrakas on behalf of Council who said it's ?great? to see ABC's work continuing.

?I remember when we first spoke a long time ago and we talked about the Gala, we talked about the events and I think you remember what I said to you, ?let's start small and eventually we'll grow. It will grow because we've got a community that wants to see it grow,' and we've got passionate people just like yourself and the rest of the committee that is flourishing and making this grow,? said Mayor Mrakas addressing Ms. Durrant. ?I appreciate everything that you guys do and next year I'm excited to see it even bigger and better.?

For more information about upcoming events from the Aurora Black Community Association, including registration and tickets, visit [www.aurorablackcommunity.com/events-opportunities](http://www.aurorablackcommunity.com/events-opportunities).

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