

## Aurora kicks off Pride Month with Town Square celebration



June marks the start of Pride Month, and the celebrations kicked off early locally as the Town joined forces with the Aurora Community Band and York Pride to host the second-annual York Pride Festival.

The brainchild of bandmates Gord Shephard and Warren Fetterly, the Aurora Pride Festival took over the Aurora Town Square space on Sunday afternoon with activities led by Drag Queen Just Peachy, themed concerts in the Performance Hall by the Aurora Community Band and Borealis Big Band, a rainbow-themed mural and music presentation led by Dave's Vinyl Party, and tables from the Aurora Public Library, Historical Society, Seniors Centre, Marquee Theatrical Productions, and more.

The festivities kicked off at 1 p.m. with an opening ceremony led by Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MPP Michael Parsa and Mayor Tom Mrakas, alongside representatives from York Pride.

"I'm thrilled we've made this an annual tradition after we saw such a positive response last year at our inaugural event, and that's due to the fact that everyone at York Pride, as well as our staff, they do a tremendous job," said Mayor Mrakas, who went onto thank York Pride for "building a culture of inclusion across the Region" and municipal staff for "creating a space [like Town Square] where celebrations like this can shine."

Addressing Shephard, he added: "Thank you for your commitment to this Festival and for bringing us all together to not only celebrate, but also send a message to the entire community" and that message is that in Aurora we fiercely believe that love is simply love, and regardless of who you are, where you're from, or who you love, we're proud that you call Aurora home.

"But today is about something more: today is also a reflection of our solidarity with the 2SLGBTQIA+ community members across the entire world who continue to fight against prejudice and for full acceptance of who they are. And the sad reality is that even here in Canada, there are still people who face prejudice and exclusion for simply being who they are and loving another person.

"So, today is also about visibility, belonging, and creating a community where everyone feels safe to be exactly who they are. Today is about reminding people that they are seen, valued, supported, and never alone" because pride is about standing together, not only in solidarity, but also joy, acceptance, and community."

Added MPP Parsa: "When we talk about inclusiveness, when we talk about making sure everyone belongs and no one's forgotten, that's the beauty of our community. You know, we live in the best province in the greatest country on the planet. We're not perfect, as the Mayor said. We still have some work to do, but when you look at some of the other jurisdictions around the world, some of the other nations, they're fighting for what we get to do here today, and that is to celebrate, and that is to talk about inclusivity."

With the Aurora Pride Festival in the books, attention now turns to the York Pride Festival, which will take place on Saturday, June

13, 2026, at Newmarket's Riverwalk Commons from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., with the Pride Parade making its way down Main Street that afternoon from 4 ? 5.45 p.m.

In addition to the ongoing exhibition of art at the Aurora Cultural Centre featuring the works of 2SLGBTQIA+ artists, Aurora's Micak Gallery will also host a Celebrating Pride exhibition at their St. Andrew's Village Plaza space from June 18 through July 4.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter