

## Aurora's Community Story reflected in new Unity on Canvas mural



How do you tell Aurora's story?

More than 300 residents helped answer that question through brushstrokes earlier this year, and their collective artistry came together last week with the unveiling of a brand-new mural at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex, entitled Unity on Canvas: Painting Our Community Story.

The latest initiative to come out of the Town of Aurora's Sport Plan, the mural was formally unveiled by Mayor Tom Mrakas, as part of Aurora's Culture Days celebrations, as MPPs Dawn Gallagher Murphy and Michael Parsa, Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese, and members of the community looked on.

"Months and months of working together and bringing communities together" is how Hailey Jones, the Town's Sport & Community Development Officer, described the finished product.

"It's amazing when you get a chance to get up close and then take a couple of steps back - you can see the passion, you can see what different people chose to paint, and I think depending on how they were feeling on different days," said Jones on the individual panels, where painting participants were given free rein on what to create.

When you step back, the individual painted squares create a "picture within a picture within a picture," ultimately coming together to form a central image of celebration.

"The image we wanted was to encapsulate all of Aurora - everyone from different backgrounds, newcomers to our area, all different abilities - and, for us, we had to take an intentional approach to visiting the Seniors' Centre, visiting recreation centres, going around to different events we knew were being hosted in the community, to make sure we were able to get multiple voices in this image," said Jones.

"People were not told what to do, what to paint; they were given a blank canvas and allowed to do whatever called them. One of the other pieces that's important is we really wanted to bring leadership in. We intentionally didn't want to have a trophy or medal everyone was chasing in the image. We intentionally removed that [because] success isn't a tangible item. It really shows [that everybody] belongs - you can compete, you can try new things, and it's okay to fail."

Speaking to the assembled crowd ahead of the unveiling, Jones, a retired professional athlete, noted that "sport is more than competition."

"It brings us together, it builds networks, and it really helps inspire the next generation," she said. "This is the legacy of today

moving into tomorrow. Sport builds community, fosters leadership, and strengthens connection.?

Jones was joined at Monday's unveiling by Olivia and Sierra, both participants in a recent Recreation & Healthy Living Leadership course.

?It was a mix of learning and growing,? said Olivia of the course, over which participants were able to gain certification in emergency first aid, fundamental movement skills, and more. ?One of the most exciting parts of this whole journey was building up to an event that was designed to give back to our community. It's been a meaningful process and we're so proud of what's come together.?

Added Sierra: ?Throughout our leadership course, we learned about different aspects of leadership and how to demonstrate it. It's not always about being the best at something, but rather learning how to listen to others and find ways to bring your ideas and strengths together to create something. This mural, being on canvas, demonstrates that by showing us that leadership is not just about one idea, but rather about bringing many people's ideas, experiences, and talents together to create something meaningful.?

As he prepared to pull down the curtain to unveil the mural, Mayor Mrakas said what makes the art piece so special is ?how it came to life.?

?Community members of all ages, abilities and backgrounds took the time to be part of this project, painting tiles that are now part of this finished piece. Together these tiles tell the story of our community,? he said. ?Many local, sport and community organizations also joined in, some taking tiles home to paint, helping ensure everyone had an opportunity to be part of it.

?This mural is more than artwork on a wall. It's a statement of inclusion, belonging and empowerment in sport ? values that define us as a Town. It's a lasting reminder of what we can achieve when we come together.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter