

Black History Gala celebrates five years of ABC, community growth

Black excellence will be celebrated in style on Friday as the Aurora Black Community Association holds its annual Black History Gala at Northridge Community Church.

Set for 6 ? 10.30 p.m. on April 11, it is a time to not only celebrate Black excellence in the community, but the remarkable growth of the Aurora Black Community Association (ABC) on the fifth anniversary of its founding.

The annual gala is typically held in February during Black History Month, but organizers opted to make it a spring affair in 2025 to showcase Black History well beyond the year's shortest month.

?By hosting this gala in April, we are taking intentional steps to expand the celebration of Black History Month beyond February ? a month too short to contain all the incredible events and activities that honour our rich history and contributions,? say organizers.

?Seeing the community come together to celebrate Black history beyond February sends a powerful and undeniable message. It shows that people truly understand that Black history is not confined to one month but is an integral part of our collective story all year round. When individuals engage and participate outside of the designated month, it reflects a deep commitment to honouring Black contributions, culture, and excellence as an ongoing priority rather than a momentary observance.?

For ABC founder and president Phiona Durrant, it's also a chance to showcase ?five years of great work, five years of growth, and five years of people working together to make these things happen.?

?We really want it to be celebrative,? she says. ?We just want it to be a celebration where people come and, no matter how they contribute ? maybe they liked a post, maybe they attended an event, maybe they gave some encouragement ? I really want people to celebrate. We want them to be smiling from the moment they walk in until the moment they walk out.?

Multiple guest speakers will share their stories throughout the evening, including Adeola Adebayo, who Durrant describes as ?a trailblazer in the financial industry and in mentorship? who ?embodies what it is to be ambitious and resilient.?. Additional speakers will include allies, dignitaries, performances from Impulse Orchestra, and live painting by local artists.

Proceeds from the gala, including raffles, silent auctions, and 50/50 draws will benefit the many programs ABC has to offer, with their I Can Swim program being the particularly timely with summer just a few months away.

The I Can Swim program aims to increase inclusiveness and safety around water, ensuring ?that no child or parent is left unreached.?

?We would love to make sure at least six to ten families this summer can get swimming lessons,? says Durrant, noting that proceeds will also benefit their Power Forward grant for young entrepreneurs in the community.

A highlight of the evening will be the presentation of the 2025 Dr. Jean Augustine Community Builder Award, an accolade founded by the ABC in honour of Augustine, Canada's first Black female Member of Parliament and a driving force behind the adoption of Black History Month Canada-wide.

This year's honouree is Phil Rose, Manager of Cultural Services for the Town of Aurora.

?It was power in having allyship with people who are advocating for you,? says Durrant of this year's honouree. ?Some people think 'advocated' can be a negative word, but it is not ? it is that voice on the inside that can say, 'Yes, this matters,' making it easier for us. I want people to come and experience an extraordinary evening of people of all races and ages participating and celebrating not just Black history, but what we're doing for the future.?

While tickets for this year's gala sold out near press time, there are plenty of opportunities to support the cause and ABC programs throughout the year. For more information, visit aurorablackcommunity.com.

By Brock Weir