

Black History Month events will centre on 'Forward Together & Forward for All'



No one can move forward alone, and this is the theme the Aurora Black Community (ABC) Association has picked to guide their Black History Month programs next month and throughout 2024.

Planning is well underway for a gala kick-off for Black History Month with volunteers set to come together at a meeting this Friday to go over final details.

The theme of 'Forward Together & Forward for All' builds upon last year's mantra of Opening Doors, which was showcased at the ABC's inaugural Black History Month gala last year.

The second-annual Gala will take place Saturday, February 3, at the Salvation Army's Northridge Community Church, located on Leslie Street, just north of Wellington.

'The topic of 'Forward Together & Forward for All' is important because we can't move forward alone,' says Phiona Durrant, President & Founder of ABC. 'Even though it has been said so many times already, the bottom line is we're celebrating Canadian history and part of our Canadian history is Black history and the contribution of the Black community to this country.'

No one who is considering purchasing a ticket for the gala should ask themselves, 'Do I belong?' she notes, noting that everybody, regardless of background, has an active role to play.

'We don't celebrate Black history because there is racism; we celebrate it because it is culture, representation and part of our history of who we are as Canadians,' says Durrant. 'We celebrate that part of our diversity of what made Canada. Change comes when we're moving together and the spirit of collaboration is what we need. We have to just move together and be interested in trying something and seeing what we can do. This event is going to be better because everyone is coming together; it's a call for people to attend, engage and be a part of a community that values inclusivity and embraces strength that we can find in this already beautiful Town of Aurora that is growing and rich in its diversity.'

This type of engagement is key for the ABC going forward into 2024.

While last year's Black History commemorations focused largely on events in February, this year they are focusing primarily on the gala for Black History Month itself while spreading their signature events over several months to achieve maximum reach.

Following the gala, winter programs will include Diversity on the Ice, an annual initiative to introduce even more families to skating in an inclusive environment.

Springtime programming from the Aurora Black Community Association will be a special film screening at the Aurora Cineplex Odeon in conjunction with the Aurora Film Circuit, a special Mother's Day event in May, and a large-scale event in August to mark Emancipation Day, which will include not only a celebration of the freedom this day represents but a showcase of international sports, including cricket and netball.

"We're spreading things out so people can get used to the engagement," says Durrant. "We haven't been able to do as much because it does take money, it does take time, and putting everything aside to invest in this. This is volunteer work, so now we're working on how we can get more people on board."

The ABC is also hoping to bring aboard more local businesses with making these Black History, diversity, and inclusion events possible.

"There has to be something in your heart," says Durrant on businesses that might want to step forward as sponsors. "There are a lot of virtue signals, but the work that I align myself with, people have to be personally invested in wanting to see their community better."

As an example, Durrant points to how one previous sponsorship of \$1,000 from a local dental office went towards sponsoring a local youth build his business.

"He is going to come and share his story at the gala this year as, because of that business, he made his first \$10,000 this summer because the business sponsor gave him that [sponsorship] to incorporate and he felt encouraged and supported. They are not just putting money behind something; these are real lives they are touching.

"People have to be convicted in their heart to want to see better, to want to just not do the status quo and do what is right by making their community a place where everybody can belong. A lot of times we see the same organizations sponsoring the same thing year after year."

For more information on the upcoming gala, including ticket information, and the whole slate of 2024 events planned by the Aurora Black Community Association and its partners, visit www.aurorablackcommunity.com.

By Brock Weir
Editor
Local Journalism Initiative Reporter