

## Black History Month proclaimed at Town Hall flag raising



York Regional Police Detective Kolin Alexander says he's very conscious of his uniform.

It's a uniform he is proud to wear, he says, but as a Black man, he says 'it's not lost' on him that what he does can 'impact members of my community.'

Ahead of the Aurora community coming together on Wednesday night at Town Hall to raise the Pan-African Flag to signal the start of Black History Month, Alexander says he struck up a conversation with a girl, Trinity, who 'had a serious look on her face.'

'I wanted to make sure she was comfortable before she jumped to any conclusions,' he said before dignitaries, community organizers and members of the public who filled Council Chambers on Wednesday night. 'Are you okay? Are you afraid?' She said she was okay and that really warmed my heart because I know that there is trauma when I put on my uniform and at times I'm a little conflicted because I love my job, this is something I really wanted to do, but I do recognize that when I put it on, and the good intentions I have, sometimes there is some impact that I'm hoping and I am working towards each and every day, and the rest of my colleagues, to make things better so little persons like Trinity will feel comfortable and I am hoping that we can get there at some point in time.'

These sentiments were echoed throughout the Chamber as representatives from all levels of government, as well as community groups, renewed calls to eradicate racism in our own community and beyond.

'This is more than a flag-raising; this is a reminder for coming together as a community to demonstrate our fearlessness for the work that has to be done, the changes we need to see, standing up against anti-Black racism,' said Ron Kellman of the Aurora Black Community Association.

These goals were reiterated by members of the Aurora Black Caucus, as well as the Town's Anti-Racism and Anti-Black Racism Task Force.

'The Aurora Black Caucus is comprised of people from all over Canada and they will attest to the fact that larger locations than Aurora come second to us when it comes to the things we have accomplished,' said Caucus chair Milton Hart. 'Let us move to a time when all of the things we speak about are engrained and entrenched in our curriculum and into our consciousness. We are not there as yet. We still have work to do.'

The work that still needs to be done was highlighted by Mark Lewis, Chair of the Town's Anti-Racism and Anti-Black Racism Task Force who said he experienced racism in York Region schools from Grade 6, and his daughter, 30 years later, 'was still dealing with the same challenges.'

"While we have made strides there's certainly a lot more work that needs to be done to eradicate racism in our community and it starts by all of us appreciating and understanding each other's cultures," said Lewis. "I thank the Town of Aurora for making a space for us to celebrate the heritage of Black Canadians."

In addition to a flag raising, Wednesday's ceremony was also an opportunity for Mayor Tom Mrakas and the Town to formally proclaim Black History Month throughout Aurora.

Reading his proclamation, Mayor Mrakas underscored the importance of recognizing and sharing "the important stories, history and achievements of the Black community."

"My heart is filled up because I look at the room and it speaks to the diversity in our community and it speaks to the fact of this tight-knit community of ours," he said. "We're growing, we're coming out, we're coming together, and these are all important things."

"My promise as Mayor of this Town, and I know Council believes in it as well, [is] we're going to do everything we can to get to that day where we can eradicate racism in our community. It's not just about our community, it's about working together. We all need to work together to make a difference and to do it right, so we're going to keep doing it."

Newmarket-Aurora MPP Dawn Gallagher Murphy noted, "Black History Month is a time to celebrate Black culture and heritage and the many vital contributions Black Ontarians have made to our province's economic, social and cultural landscape. Throughout our history, Black Ontarians have helped to build our great Province with achievements in the arts, the sciences, business and politics and more."

"Black History Month is also a time to acknowledge that racism still exists in our society. Our government is committed to being an ally by ensuring we invest in programs that combat the negative impacts of racism and hate. I am proud to be a local partner in supporting our local Aurora-Newmarket Black Community today and into the future."

"We're not perfect," added Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MPP Michael Parsa of Canada. "We can continue to do better, we can continue to learn from the past and the only way we can do that is by gathering, by listening, and making sure that we listen to those who expect us to do more [and] for us to be better."

"All Ontarians deserve a place to live free of racism, free of violence and free of fear."

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