

Black History Month programs had people think differently about moving forward



The Aurora Black Community Association is looking back on another successful series of engaging Black History Month programs, but also looking forward on ways to continue the conversation.

In conjunction with several community groups, and the Town of Aurora, along the way, the Aurora Black Community Association (ABC) helped kick off Black History Month at the start of February with the raising of the Pan-African Flag at Town Hall. Further events included a Black History Month gala with keynote speaker Dr. Jean Augustine, a paint and poetry night, a Diversity on Ice afternoon, all before a special film screening last week at Cineplex Aurora, co-hosted by the Aurora Film Circuit.

"Seeing so many people able to come out, enjoy, and work together is important," ABC founder and president Phiona Durrant tells *The Auroran*, adding the feedback she received from event attendees was particularly heartening. "They carry a ripple effect. Black History Month can be seen in so many ways: it can feel heavy, it can feel negative, it can feel bitter."

This will be kept in mind as they move forward with the idea of Black History every day.

Durrant likens community engagement between the end of one February and the beginning of the next as the "notes" that fall between the beginning and the ending of a song, and the momentum is there to keep the community humming along.

"A Black history event is not the change, it's the work we're doing in between to build collaborative relationships [and] the meetings we've been having about measurable equity is what's really going to bring the real change we're looking for. It's good to have the notes, but it's the in-between pieces.

"We can easily create something that is more diverse, but that should be used as a tool to see if equity is really happening. You can have maybe five per cent [of municipal staff be diverse] and then think, 'Okay, that isn't good enough because you need more?' but that doesn't mean equity is happening. That doesn't mean people from diverse backgrounds, from different sexual orientations, from different skill sets, are really growing in that organization. Diversity on its own really does nothing for us. What is equity?"

Over the next little while, Durrant says she will be reaching out to various organizations to ensure opportunities for Black youth, as well as brainstorming ways to get people to "stop focusing on racism or think differently from how they focus on that because what it kind of does is have you constantly explaining over and over."

"Stop looking at what the barriers are, but look at what they can do to make a difference," she says. "Barriers are always going to be there, that's a given, and I can't see a time where we're not going to be facing barriers" but how do we get involved? Leaving the gala,

part of what was beautiful coming from the community was, 'What can we do to help?'

'Nobody teaches compassion, courage, confidence, active listening; we're not taught how to receive feedback, how to effectively confront. We're not taught how to have a difficult conversation. It's up to all of us to change our mindset and position ourselves and be intentional about it.'

By Brock Weir
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