

## Community organizations, Police present Black Community Barbecue

Black Community organizations in the area are coming together with York Regional Police this weekend for a community picnic in which they hope to foster ?meaningful engagement.?

Set for Saturday, June 14, from 10.30 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Community Safety Village, located at Bruce's Mill Conservation Area in Whitchurch-Stouffville, the event promises a day of family fun, but also a chance to brainstorm ways all organizations ? including the Aurora Black Community Association (ABC) and NACCA (Newmarket African Caribbean Canadian Association) ? can move forward together.

?Engagement is one of our priorities as an organization, and it's something that our community needs and have asked for from us,? says YRP Superintendent Sarah Riddell. ?I think sometimes we get it right, sometimes we get it wrong, so the purpose of this event is? we're inviting the community into our backyard.?

Plans for the day, she says, were developed in consultation with leaders of the ABC, NACCA, and more, says Riddell, including ?what we can learn together to determine what it's going to look like to have more good days, and to continue building that trust, because there's trust that needs to be built.?

?The relationship is not perfect, but as long as everyone is willing to work on it, you know there's going to be some level of success,? she says. ?York Regional Police as a whole are dedicated to ensuring that everyone in our community feels like they belong and feels respected, valuable and heard. I'm just looking forward to all of us getting together and enjoying each other's company in a really positive way.?

ABC founder Phiona Durrant says the fact Saturday's picnic is a Police-led initiative is ?amazing? and she sees it as a further community partnership.

?It's about accountability, visibility, and intentional relationships. I personally value the police a lot and believe that they are a great part of the community,? says Durrant. ?This is not a homogenous situation. It's individual organization and individual experiences. I can only speak from my experience because I have both experience with the Toronto Police and York Region and trust is a big thing. We don't build trust through headlines; we build it through moments like this that we're about to create.

?We have to take responsibility for our part and sometimes we get caught up into the negative and the blame and we miss the good things that are happening. York Region, in my opinion, has been extremely intentional about relationships and that stands out and really sets them apart ? and they are very consistent. From my experience, they come across as very authentic. I believe they're going to be a different community; we can expect better from the police and better relationships, but we also have to put the work in and that's so epic.?

A portion of that work will be put in during the panel discussion that is intended to explore what it truly means to have ?meaningful engagement.?

?It's recognition that we're working on the relationship,? says Riddell, when asked to unpack what would entail a truly meaningful engagement opportunity. ?We need the engagement, not to just be that we're in the same place at the same time and that's it; it needs to be about building relationships, it needs to be about respecting and valuing diversity. The name of the event is ?Unity and Diversity,' about recognizing the unity that can come when diversity is respected and celebrated, so it is meaningful from that standpoint. It's about how we can work together. How we can co-create the steps forward in this relationship. That's where it makes it meaningful. It's about co-creating positive experiences so that we can move forward.?

Adds Durrant: ?Everything is about relationships and I love that we're doing this over food, because that's how the Aurora Black Community started ? right in my own kitchen, having honest conversations around food, and this is just a bigger version of the same

idea. [This event being co-led] is a model of change we truly believe in. Everything is really about the people.

?The relationship is the real focus of it. When we talk about intentional or meaningful, it's going to be different for everybody because what's meaningful to me might be looked upon like nothing to somebody else. But when we are bringing people to the table, they have a voice, they are being heard, they are participating, and they're not just being listened to ? but you can see that their feedback is being received and incorporated. That, to me, is meaningful.?

For more information on how to attend, email Phiona Durrant and the Aurora Black Community Association at [abc@aurorablackcommunity.com](mailto:abc@aurorablackcommunity.com).

**By Brock Weir**