

'Every Child Matters' rink boards unveiled at local arenas



Rink boards in all five of Aurora's arenas will now bear the evocative and universal message that Every Child Matters.

The new orange rink boards were unveiled by Mayor Tom Mrakas on Tuesday, March 21, as Traditional Anishinaabe Grandmother Kim Wheatley looked on.

'The Truth & Reconciliation Commission of Canada created 94 Calls to Action to address the legacy of residential schools,' said the Town in a statement. 'The 94 Calls to Action cover issues such as child welfare, education, health, language, culture, media and more. In support of these calls to action, the Town recognizes the far-reaching and profound impacts of residential schools and has created a space to provide a constant, visual reminder that Every Child does Matter.'

Ahead of this week's unveiling, Mayor Mrakas told The Auroran that the local community, like so many others across Canada 'has been mourning with Indigenous communities as they've continued to discover unmarked burial sites and graves on the grounds of former residential schools' and the Town's Indigenous Relations Committee, which includes Ms. Wheatley, brainstormed ways to 'ensure that we appropriately honour and remember Residential School survivors, their families, and the children who never made it home.'

'The concept of having Every Child Matters artwork on rink boards in our arenas is a creative way to ensure there is a continual reminder, in a highly public and visible space, of the legacy of the residential school system,' he said. 'And I know many Aurorans will be incredibly supportive of this initiative, as so many have expressed their solidarity with Indigenous communities, particularly over the last couple of years, as more potential burial sites have been discovered.'

In addition to many collaborations with Ms. Wheatley over the last few years, the Town has also been consulting with the Chippewas of Georgina Island, the nearest First Nation to Aurora, on several initiatives.

Amongst their feedback was a visual display that Every Child Matters would be an 'important signal to the wider community of the Town's commitment to meaningful and lasting reconciliation,' said the Mayor.

'I've had many powerful experiences over the last few years at these commemorations and gatherings, especially when talking with leaders and members of the Indigenous community. For me, a big takeaway is that while we're making progress on uncovering the truth of the Residential School system, Reconciliation will most certainly be a long process,' he said. 'As a municipality, while we can work closely on initiatives like National Day for Truth and Reconciliation or our permanent land acknowledgement [installed on

plaques at municipal facilities], we simply don't have the fiscal firepower to unilaterally implement the economic and social policies that many Indigenous leaders and communities are advocating for. So, for me, as a Mayor, I've learned over the last few years that I can play a part as an advocate, and provide allyship to Indigenous communities as they work with the provincial and federal governments on the more systemic changes.

?We're of course always looking to enhance the educational experiences for residents through our National Day for Truth and Reconciliation activities in September and during National Indigenous History Month in June. But we're also actively working on other initiatives, for example, exploring a location where community members can come to offer their condolences to Indigenous communities during times of grief.?

The installation of rink boards is just the latest example of the Town's drive to foster inclusion within the community. Recent instances have included collaborations with the Aurora Black Community and Aurora Black Caucus to fly the Pan-African Flag at Town Hall, as well as last week's event to raise the Lion and Sun flag at the heart of municipal government to mark Persian Heritage Month.

Permanent examples, in addition to the Land Acknowledgement plaques, include the Diversity and Inclusion Mural at on Yonge Street, just south of Church Street, and the Rainbow Crosswalk just north at Wellington Street.

?[These are] beautiful expression of what diversity and inclusion means in Aurora,? said Mrakas when asked what other initiatives might be in the works. ?What I'll say now is that residents should stay tuned for more opportunities to engage with us on how we strengthen the way we acknowledge the diverse and dynamic residents and communities that call Aurora home.?

For more on the ceremony, including Ms. Wheatley's poignant remarks, see next week's edition of The Auroran.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter