

## Fifth-annual Black History Gala celebrates Unity, Culture, and Legacy



On Friday, April 11, the Aurora Black Community Association brought together people from all walks of life for its fifth annual Black History Gala, a sold-out celebration with the theme of "One Love, One Heart."

The evening, intentionally held outside of Black History Month, was designed to reinforce the message that Black history is Canadian history and deserves to be celebrated and acknowledged all year round, not confined to a single month.

Hosted by the ABC team, including founder Phiona Durant, the gala was emceed by Emily Mills, founder of How She Hustles, a network that seeks to connect BIPOC women and amplify their voices.

The event drew a diverse crowd, including community members, law enforcement officers, and elected public officials. Mayor Tom Mrakas, Ward 6 Councillor Harold Kim, and Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo were among the attendees, along with Liberal candidate Leah Taylor-Roy, MPP Michael Parsa, outgoing MP Tony Van Bynen, and MPP Dawn Gallagher Murphy.

The night opened with a red-carpet and appetizers, served in the main foyer of the Northridge Community Church, along with live painting done by artists Anthony Pullano and Andrea MacLeod.

Youth took centre stage at the beginning of the gala, with two local teens, Naomi Salmon and Idara Udom, performing the Canadian National Anthem on piano, and singing the Black anthem, Lift Every Voice, respectively.

Keynote speakers brought powerful stories and reflections to the evening.

Adeola Adebayo shared her journey through the finance industry as a Black woman. Sutha Balasingham, a public servant in the human services sector, gave an impactful talk on allyship, stating, "allyship isn't something that you self-proclaim, it's something that's given to you by the community with whom you're standing in solidarity."

Aurora Mayor Tom Mrakas also gave a speech, thanking ABC for their impactful work and echoing the gala's call for unity.

"Tonight's theme of One Love, One Heart is not only a beautiful sentiment, but a timely reminder of what truly connects us?It reminds us that, even though we come from different backgrounds, cultures, and experiences, we are united by love?love for our families, our neighbours, and the place that we call home."

Guests were treated to a Caribbean buffet and a night of lively entertainment. Performances by musical ensemble Quisha Wint,

Quincy Bullen, Lance Anderson, and the soulful Caribbean-Canadian Jazz and Blues singer DebonayR (deh-buh-nair) kept the energy vibrant and the celebration alive.

The night concluded with an awards ceremony.

Three local changemakers were honoured with the Dr. Jean Augustine Community Builder Award, named after the first Black Canadian woman to serve as a Minister of the Crown and Member of Parliament. Dr. Augustine, attended the gala and presented the awards alongside ABC founder Phiona Durant.

This year's recipients were retired YRP officer Keith Merith, Town of Aurora Cultural Services Manager Phil Rose, and local business owner Wayne Hoo Hing.

**By Selena Loureiro**