

## Flag raising signals start of Black History Month in Aurora



Aurora came together to mark the start of Black History Month with the raising of the Pan-African Flag at Town Hall on Friday evening.

The flag-raising ceremony, hosted by the Town of Aurora and the Aurora Black Community Association (ABC), was an evening of celebration and reflection, with poignant words shared by community leaders in Council Chambers, and live music and celebratory treats feeding mind, body and soul.

The observance began outside for the flag-raising itself, where Mayor Tom Mrakas formally proclaimed February as Black History Month in Aurora.

"Black History Month continues to provide the Town of Aurora with the opportunity to celebrate the contributions and vital role Canadians of African descent have made to strengthen the social and cultural mosaic of our community, province and country," said Mayor Mrakas issuing the proclamation.

Inside, where he was joined by Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MPP Michael Parsa, former MP Leah Taylor Roy, members of Council, and leaders of Central York Fire Services, York Regional Police, and York Paramedic Services, the Mayor thanked members of the ABC for their "leadership, contributions and lived experiences" which "continue to shape our Town in meaningful and lasting ways."

"Coming together to raise the Pan-African Flag and mark the beginning of Black History Month is a powerful and meaningful tradition here in the Town of Aurora," he continued. "When we celebrate Black History, we are celebrating Canadian history and recognising the extraordinary achievements and contributions that Black Canadians have made and continue to make in communities across our country. Black History has always been driven by grassroots leadership, by community organizations, and advocates who ensure that these stories are told, shared and celebrated. Because of that work, communities like ours have the opportunity to learn, reflect, and come together."

"It's also important to recognize that Black History Month is not only about celebration, it's also about acknowledging Canada's history of anti-Black racism and the impacts that are still felt today. It reminds us of the responsibility we all share as individuals and as a community to speak up, to listen, and to act against prejudice and discrimination in all its forms. At a time when division and intolerance can feel increasingly visible beyond our borders, gatherings like this remind us of who we are and the kind of community we are committed to building here in the Town of Aurora."

The flag, he concluded, is a "powerful symbol of our shared commitment to equity, inclusion, dialogue and unity."

These sentiments were shared by keynote speaker Unna Fletcher, Director of Operations at City College (Newmarket and Toronto).

Fletcher thanked the ABC for their "unwavering commitment and dedication" to the local community and said the moment of raising the flag is "one of recognition, reflection and pride."

"Black history is part of our shared story, one shaped by resilience, creativity, leadership, and our enduring commitment to community," she said. "Today, we honour the generation who paved the way, the individuals who continue to make a difference? individuals like [ABC Founder and President] Phiona Durrant and the legacy that lives on through culture, service and progress. Please know that Black History is not a side chapter of history. It is not confined to a single month. It is the foundation of innovation, culture, resistance, and progress that has shaped this nation and the world. From the brilliance of inventors and artists, to the courage of activists and everyday people who demanded dignity in the face of injustice, Black history is human history.

"The flag rises in honor of those names we know. And those names history tried to forget. It honours the enslaved who endured, the leaders who dared to dream, the organizers who disrupt systems of inequality, and the generation who continue to push us closer to justice. But today, it's not about the past. Black History Month calls on us to reflect on the present and to shape the future. It challenges us to ask difficult questions. Number one, are we creating spaces where equity is real, not symbolic? Are we listening to Black voices, not only when it's comfortable, but when it's necessary? Are we turning remembrance into action? Raising this flag today is a visible reminder that representation does matter, that acknowledgment matters, and that progress requires intention.

"Today, let this flag stand as a symbol of pride, resilience, and excellence. Let it remind us that honored Black history means committing ourselves every day to fairness, inclusion, and opportunity for all. As the flag rises, may it inspire us to educate, to advocate, and to lead with courage."

Durrant led attendees in an exercise between speakers, inviting everyone to grasp hands and form a circle around Council chambers and attendance was such two concentric circles were required to accommodate everybody.

"There is no collective strength if we're not holding onto each other," said Durrant. "I see everyone today and the problem is we keep letting go and this [circle] is the protection we have."

By Brock Weir  
Editor  
Local Journalism Initiative Reporter