

Former Cabinet Minister to provide keynote at Black History Month Gala

Former Federal Cabinet Minister Marci Ien will be the keynote speaker at the Aurora Black Community Association's upcoming Black History Month Gala.

Commemorations of February as Black History Month will kick off Friday, January 30, at Aurora Town Hall with the ceremonial raising of the Pan African Flag, and continue on Saturday, February 7, with the Gala.

Set for the Royal Venetian Mansion on Industrial Parkway South from 5 ? 9 p.m., this year's theme is ?Collective Strength, Shared Future.?

?We really want people to leave feeling empowered, inspired, and understand the depth of community-building and richness within our community,? says Aurora Black Community Founder and President Phiona Durrant.

Previous Black History Month gala themes have included ?One Love?, which continues to be a guiding philosophy of the ABC, ?Opening Doors and Making Room?, and ?Forward Together,? but this year Durrant says she was looking for a theme that summed up all of that while also highlighting a community's collective strength.

?Something that's always resonated with me personally is one hand can't clap, and that's something my grandfather taught me,? she says. ?It's collective strength. We don't get here alone ? that includes the shoulders we stand on to be here like Dr. Jean Augustine [who led the way for Black History Month to be marked in Canada], and those shoulders we have to treat with honour.

?We're honoured and so humbled they have already laid that foundation for us and that shared future.?

While the Black History Month Gala was originally announced last year as a collaboration between the ABC and the Newmarket African Canadian Caribbean Association (NACCA), the ABC is now steering the event to completion solo. While Durrant and the ABC's Endra Musewe say that development is ?unfortunate,? they remain focused on the theme.

?We're making it a really fun, joyous time, and also really celebrating Black culture ? and just the diversity in Black culture as well because a lot of times I don't think people are exposed to it,? says Musewe. ?Music is a big part of the culture, and there will be a fireside chat with Marci Ien, and that is going to be very interesting, just showcasing the Black community to the broader community.?

Marci Ien, a former CTV broadcaster, served as Member of Parliament for Toronto Centre from 2020 ? 2025 and, from 2021 to 2025 served as Canada's Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth. She declined to seek re-election in the 2025 Federal Election.

While Ien has not been previously involved with the ABC's work, Durrant says the former politician was drawn to the community-centred work carried out by the Association.

In addition to the fireside chat, ticket-holders will be able to ask some questions as well.

?People will be leaving with a little bit of this and a little bit of that because there's so much that will be taken on in that two-hour program,? says Durrant. ?The community has never failed the ABC because when ABC shows up, we don't show up just for Black things, we show up for community and, as a result, the reciprocity is always there and the Town of Aurora, as a municipality, is standing beside us, not behind us. It's just surrounding us with that support. We could not ask for anything better, so this is going to be super, super amazing.?

Adds Musewe: ?We want people to understand the rich culture here.?

For more information about the upcoming Flag Raising Ceremony and the Black History Month gala, including how to reserve and secure your tickets, visit aurorablackcommunity.com.

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