

Menorah to be lit following graffiti incidents

By Brock Weir

A recent wave of hateful and anti-Semitic graffiti has shone a light on some of the darker waves in our community, but the Town of Aurora and Chabad Aurora are teaming up next week to shine an even brighter light on peace and freedom.

Members of the public are invited to come out to Town Hall for the symbolic lighting of a larger-than-life menorah this Monday, December 18, at 5.30 p.m., led by Rabbi Yosef Hecht, Mayor Geoff Dawe and members of Council.

Monday is the seventh day of the eight-day festival of lights and this community celebration will feature Hanukkah-related treats for members of the public to sample, including latkes and donuts.

‘When we were talking about moving from a ‘Tree Lighting’ to a ‘Christmas Tree Lighting’ last month, what was at the back of my mind was this would probably expand out into recognition of other religions, because it is not just Christmas and Christians, there is Hanukkah and other observances as well,’ says Mayor Dawe.

This was all being formulated when the York Regional Police appealed for information on a spate of hateful and anti-Semitic graffiti which was found outside Aurora High School at the end of November.

It is just the latest in a long line of incidents that have taken place in Aurora over the course of 2017, including graffiti at Hartman Public School on Aurora's east side, to swastikas tagging pavement and street furniture in the Town's southwest quadrant.

‘When those activities came to light, we were disheartened by the hate and anti-Semitic graffiti, and I said we really should stand up and do something to send a message that we stand together, that we stand in unity, and we want to spread that universal message of freedom,’ Rabbi Hecht tells *The Auroran*. ‘The idea is really about illuminating and adding light to the world and every day adding another candle and bring more light into the world. In light of recent events, we believe this is an opportune time to come together as a community, at Town Hall, which is really a beacon of light, and to stand proud, stand together, and celebrate in unity.’

Both Town Hall and Chabad Aurora reached out to one another and everything fell into place, all with the common message.

‘These are learned behaviours,’ says Mayor Dawe of the vandalism. ‘If people can learn that behaviour, they can learn other behaviours. No one is born hating; you learn that. We can teach that there is a better way to go about life.’

There are also certain messages Rabbi Hecht says he hopes the community takes away from the celebration.

Hanukkah has its roots in the desecration of the Second Temple. There was only enough oil found to keep the light burning for a single evening, but the oil lasted for seven nights.

‘That miracle sends a message,’ says Rabbi Hecht. ‘It's a universal message. We are all here to spread the light, spread the love and spread this unity. When we stand together, we stand strong and when we stand strong those who, for whatever reason, desecrate or do disheartening things, we need to continue to send this message of love and unity. When we illuminate everyone in their own life, their own communities, their families, places where they have positions of responsibility, the world will become a better place.

‘It will bring more light into the world and our communities will be brighter communities.’