

NACCA celebrates the Black Family as 'A Source of Perseverance and Resilience' this month

The role of the Black family as 'A Source of Perseverance and Resilience' is in sharp focus this month as the Newmarket African Caribbean Community Association (NACCA) launches a series of programs for Black History Month.

'These unprecedented and challenging times have provided us with an opportunity to re-evaluate our relationships, including those with family,' say organizers. 'Where possible, we have drawn upon the strength of family to negate isolation and social uncertainties.'

'Family is a basic unit in every society; however, the composition of the family is more complex to define. There is recognition that the 'ideal family' is one subset of a diverse society. Nowhere has this been more marked than within the diverse multi-ethnic Black community. Black families are not all the same and, like other racial ethnicities, the geographical location, culture, religion and socio-economic status play a large part in the modeling of each family.'

'The historical challenges of the Black family from enslavement to present day are rooted in structural and institutional racism; this has served to delegitimize traditional African norms. In order to survive, the Black family has had to transform itself to buffer the experiences and impacts. Family and kin networks have served as an important bulwark.'

NACCA kicked off its commemorations on Wednesday afternoon with a flag raising in Newmarket, with a subsequent flag raising in East Gwillimbury, before gathering at Newmarket's Old Town Hall for a reception and art exhibition.

Programs continue this week with 'Walk with Our Children,' a special speaker event with Ginelle Skerit on February 8, and an illumination at Newmarket's Riverwalk Commons on Thursday night at dusk.

'This new public space is important to bringing awareness within our community, to advancing knowledge with our community around just having a greater respect for the diverse heritage, culture and contributions of Black Canadians to the building of our community and our country,' says NACCA President Jerisha Grant-Hall, noting the program continues on February 15 with a panel discussion 'Achievers in Black Excellence,' which will be led by previous winners of NACCA scholarships.

'We know the Black family is diverse, it's intersectional. It's multifaceted,' she says. 'Of course, a part of our Black family are children and youth. If we're showcasing the resilience and strength of family, we can't do that without showcasing the children and youth as well. The Achievers in Black Excellence is really a panel discussion to highlight what these young people 'how have they been able to achieve? What are the things that have brought them into their excellence?... They are all extraordinary folks living extraordinary lives and we want to engage with them to understand what the community's influence on their drive has been.'

As Black History Month continues, Grant-Hall says it's important to keep in mind that it's really about 'Black History 365' and 366 in a leap year.'

'What February does it is sets time aside, that's all it is; it's just time set aside to amplify. Throughout the year, we're doing Black History, we're making Black history. The people who are a part of our organization, doing this work every day, are making Black history every day. The whole point of February is to set aside time to focus specifically on building awareness and knowledge. As an organization, all of our programs, the camp we hold in the Summertime, it is Afro-centric. It teaches Black history and Black heritage and brilliance. We as an organization we're not relegating this information to February but we understand that February is time we're setting aside to amplify and advance awareness and knowledge.'

'We want people to leave these things and ask more questions and engage in more conversations, become change-makers for the things that they see in our community that are not equity building things, that are not inclusive. The whole point is to leave our community better than we had inherited it, so that is our goal: the goal is to engage our community, to move people to action, to

build their curiosity and knowledge, and to have them make a difference, to leave Newmarket better than they found it.?

For a full rundown of NACCA's programs throughout February and beyond, visit www.naccacommunity.ca/black-history-month-2023.html.

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