

New Year will be one of highlighting Indigenous perspectives at APL



Indigenous perspectives will be amplified at the Aurora Public Library this year as they continue on the path towards Truth & Reconciliation.

Indigenous Teachings is a new initiative of the Aurora Public Library (APL) which, in 2024, will take the place of the One Book One Aurora project, which marked its tenth anniversary last year.

Reccia Mandelcorn, APL's Manager of Community Collaboration, says One Book One Aurora (OBOA) had a highly successful decade, and might return in future years, but the decision was made to feature, instead of just one book, 'many of the fabulous books written by Indigenous authors.'

These volumes will inspire at least three months of expansive programming.

'Our many successful events broadened our community's knowledge of Indigenous issues, but they had been scattered throughout the years and often cluster around days of national recognition,' says Mandelcorn. 'The Truth & Reconciliation Calls to Action provide a pathway to building a relationship with Indigenous peoples based on the recognition of rights, respect and partnership. All of the programs we had offered to the community so far has been positively received with calls for more.'

'Rather than one book, we're going to focus on Indigenous writing and programming to kind of expand our horizons and respond to some of the calls for Truth & Reconciliation.'

Providing some blocks to the foundation of the Indigenous Teachings program are some of the books and reads Mandelcorn says she gravitated towards 'not necessarily by intention' but nonetheless introduced her to 'so many wonderful' Indigenous authors.

'Ten years of OBOA seemed to be a milestone and for me this is an exciting way for me to offer something new for the community and something I think our community wants ' and something we actually all have a responsibility to do ourselves,' she says.

By mid-month, a new portal guiding the program will be available at indigenousteachings.ca.

When fully up and running, it will include an Indigenous Reads Online Challenge put together by APL staff, featuring books appropriate for all levels of reader, and this will help form the basis of programming.

In-person programs will kick off April 18 at 7 p.m. with a presentation in the APL living room led by Dr. Ruth Green on the subject of 'It's More Than a Land Acknowledgement.' An Associate Professor at York University's School of Social Work, Dr. Green will look at the evolution of land acknowledgements and how it is time to look at a different approach.

“This is very important to be because, as we gather in places now, it is so common for an organizer or host to read a land acknowledgement; I do this myself and every time I deliver a land acknowledgement I re-write it somewhat to make myself think about what I am saying so it doesn't become rote,” says Mandelcorn. “Delivering a land acknowledgement has become so expected that many people say it has lost all meaning. We're inviting the community to learn from Dr. Green on how to move from land acknowledgement to solidarity statements.”

Next up is an evening with Asha Frost, an Indigenous healer, speaker and best-selling author of *You Are the Medicine*, which will take place on Monday, April 22 at 7 p.m., also in the APL Living Room.

“She talks about the essence of Indigenous wisdom and will be on our stage,” Mandelcorn explains, noting this talk coincides very intentionally with Earth Day.

Programming in May will be virtual with at-home screenings of the 2022 documentary *you Can Call Me Roger*, the link for which will be made available to registrants ahead of Sunday, May 5.

“It's a story about hope that depicts the life of retired Assembly of First Nations Regional Chief Roger Joseph Augustine and his lived experience with the assault against Indigenous people. The focus of this film promotes the learning of our history, providing a contextual window into the long history of colonization and it serves as an important vehicle for understanding truth, healing and reconciliation,” says Mandelcorn. “It will be an opportunity for our community to watch an important film that they might not be able to see otherwise.”

June will bring a bounty of programming featuring popular returning presenters.

On Sunday, June 2, 2-Spirit Ojibwe painter Patrick Hunter will return for an art workshop, co-hosted by Pflag York Region to coincide with Pride Month. Hunter will be followed on Saturday, June 15, by fellow artist Todd Jamieson of the Oneida First Nation, with a presentation on Indigenous Ways of Knowing.

“Patrick paints what he sees through a spiritual lens which was inspired by his homeland, surrounded by original works of Norval Morriseau,” says Mandelcorn. “We are incredibly grateful to Pflag for the ongoing collaboration we have with them. This is a really magnificent opportunity to sign up for this program. Once we start the registration, I know it is probably going to be filled in 48 hours.”

“Todd will be sharing the true history of this land and the unbalanced power dynamic put in place by colonial violence that remain in place today. Through conversation and a fascinating hands-on opportunity to engage with Indigenous artefacts, various tools and clothing, hides, crafts, we hope to learn how we can all take part in building a genuine decolonization movement that respects land on which we are all living and the people to whom it belongs.”

Looking ahead to this roster of activities, one that will only grow in the lead-up to April, Mandelcorn says she “knows the community will embrace it” and “focus on the right things to do.”

“I think we all have a role to play in the reconciliation process and it goes beyond dedicated months or days and it goes beyond the recitation of land acknowledgements. It is my hope that this project is such that we as settlers can learn from Indigenous teachings, historical, political and cultural and we move forward with deliberate intent and we take responsibility with respect to the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action and that is a personal statement from me about what this project means to me.”

By Brock Weir
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