

Outstanding community members saluted at flag raising to mark Black History Month



The contributions of Black Canadians to both the country and the local community were saluted on Thursday afternoon as dignitaries gathered at Town Hall to raise the Pan-African flag to kick-off Black History Month.

The annual ceremony took place in Council Chambers this year and was led by both the Town of Aurora and the Aurora Black Community (ABC) Association.

The ABC set this year's Black History Month theme as "Forward Together, Forward for All" and this, said ABC President Phiona Durrant, was exemplified by the leaders in the room "all from different backgrounds but united in a common cause.

"Our theme is Forward Together, Forward for All " we can't keep the way we have been doing things and get change," said Durrant. "These are people who stand with us and always support us, and are friends to us."

In her remarks, Durrant paid tribute to Black community members who are now featured in street banners along Wellington Street, including educator and author Dr. Vincent Conville, community leader Ron Kellman, who was particularly lauded for his efforts to bring the sport of Road Tennis to Aurora and the York Region District School Board, and couple Jodi-Ann and Alvin Morrison, both of whom serve as OPP Constables out of their Aurora detachment.

"When we see visible representation, it challenges those stereotypes," said Durrant, noting that some people view the Black community as a "homogenous" group.

"When we see officers here, the first Black couple in the OPP's life to come together as one working as a family, that's a big deal," she continued. "A lot of stigma goes with the uniform, but the uniform is very important to me because they are the same police that we say 'defund' or don't help, they show up in our Black community?we have to show common sense."

Also taking part in the ceremony were area MPs Leah Taylor Roy and Tony Van Bynen, MPPs Michael Parsa and Dawn Gallagher Murphy, and members of Aurora Council.

In his remarks, Parsa noted that the United Nations declared the International Decade of People of African Descent in 2015 and end of that decade nears, "our fight for justice and recognition of African descent will be " and is " an ongoing effort."

?By embracing diversity and unity, we can overcome challenges and create communities, countries and a global community where everyone feels fair and everyone is able to live in freedom and justice,? he said. ?We need to continue our support of one another and recognize that our differences are the foundation of our shared success ? and that is why I want to thank each and every one of you for being here today. Your presence is a statement.?

The importance of the February 1 ceremony was underscored by Mayor Mrakas who took to the podium to issue the Town's formal declaration of Black History Month.

?I am so proud there are Black History Month banners flying high above Wellington, highlighting Black community members who have made an impact in our community,? he said. ?Black history is Canadian history and Black History Month has taken on increasing importance to us as a municipality. That is why we continue to support initiatives led directly by Black community members.

?But as much as Black History Month is a time for celebration, it's also a time for reflection. The reality is that Canada has a history of anti-Black racism and communities and individuals continue to face systemic racism today. Battling racism often requires us to look deeply within our hearts and challenge ourselves, our family members, friends and colleagues. When we hear of racism and hurtful stereotypes being used, or when we identify barriers to inclusion, it's incumbent upon all of us to speak up and stand up.?

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