

## Police mark Black History month boosting ?Unity in the Community?



By Brock Weir

Unity is essential a strong community, according to York Regional Police as they mark the start of Black History Month. Hundreds of people from across York Region gathered the YRP's headquarters in Aurora on Saturday morning for the annual celebration to pay tribute to African-Canadian trailblazers within the local police community as well as celebrate the theme of ?Unity in the Community.?

Featuring entertainment from singer Renee the Voice and Latoya Mullings, as well as Josette Leader on the steel pan drum, it was a upbeat occasion tinged with poignancy.

?Today, we have gathered to celebrate 21 years of Black History month in Canada and 13 years of celebrations right here at the York Regional Police,? said emcee Sergeant Kolin Alexander. ?We gather to pay respect to those who helped pave the way for future generations and to highlight the achievements of those who are making a difference right here today.?

Among those celebrated on Saturday were Markham resident Clive Hylton, who received the York Regional Police's Afro-Caribbean Canadian Internal Support Network Award for his work in youth mentorship, as well as one of their own: York Regional Police Superintendent Keith Merith, who recently announced his retirement after more than 30 years with the police service.

?Over the past few days, all of the Black officers here have been in a fog of disbelief upon hearing that Superintendent Keith Merith will be retiring in a couple of weeks after 30 years of dedication to York Regional Police,? said Deputy Chief Andre Crawford.

?Keith and I started our careers on the same day and over the years I always thought he was the one, one of the few black officers who had a chance of rising to the level that I am now honoured to be at today. I personally thank Keith for his support over the years and his ongoing commitment to this organization. Keith has been a shining example of a leader, a mentor and a friend to all of our black officers.?

Deputy Chief Crawford also spoke to the sudden immediacy of the always timeless message of ?Unity in the Community.?

?We are privileged to act as hosts as we celebrate the significant role and contribution of black history towards the building of Canada, our multicultural nation of nations,? he said. ?All one has to do is reflect upon the troubling events of the last two weeks taking place south of our border. We are bearing witness to a nation that is tearing itself apart, a nation that is losing its unity, a nation that has lost the value of community. We must never forget that that is not us. We must never forget that we as Canadians are far better than that.

?We are grateful for our community and our country as we celebrate the power of unity. Unity within our community has helped shaped the resilience and determination we all feel in the ongoing quest for freedom and equality. It is fitting that we set aside time this month to highlight and recognize the successes, the achievements and the contributions of black history to our communities, locally and abroad. Remembering and honouring these trailblazers will hopefully inspire future generations of youth to strive for excellence by being the very best that they can be.?