

Power Forward Grant awarded to aspiring music producer



An aspiring young music producer was honoured by the Aurora Black Community Association with its 2026 Power Forward Grant.

Keil Thomas was honoured by the Aurora Black Community Association (ABC) and Aurora Council at last week's Council meeting where ABC Founder and President Phiona Durrant explained how the grant will help Thomas propel his business forward.

'The Power Forward Grant is about economic empowerment. Change doesn't happen without economic empowerment,' said Durrant, noting Thomas' impact within the ABC itself. 'Keil, we thank you for showing up in the community, we congratulate you on your entrepreneur journey, and this uplifts you. We don't just give money, this is not just a give-out, it's how mentorship will be provided to these youths. Financial literacy is provided so it's not just 'take this and go.' There's three months of training provided to [grant recipients] about how to use money, how we invest, and how we give back to our community.'

In turn, Thomas thanked the ABC for its support, which he said made him 'extremely happy and grateful,' and Durrant herself, who he said was 'supportive to so many people.'

'I'd also like to thank my parents for their support and the way they encouraged me to try things,' said the honouree. 'Thank you for being here to help me develop my business idea and for giving me so much support throughout this journey.'

'This grant will really help move my new DJ business forward. I'll now be able to get some of the equipment I still need, and it will help me with marketing costs like business cards and some of my website services. I'm really looking forward to the entrepreneurship training, mentorship, and business development coaching. This will all help me as I work towards my goal of becoming a music producer.'

Thomas was congratulated by Mayor Tom Mrakas and members of Council, with Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese asking the grant recipient to share more about his journey and the memories he's made along the way.

'I would say the people that I've been surrounded with and the people that I will meet along the way that are here to help me and support me,' Thomas replied. 'I'd say that's definitely one of the most memorable and most important moments of this journey.'

Support was also offered by Ward 6 Councillor Harold Kim, who highlighted the impact of the Power Forward program.

'This isn't just about financial support, it's about belief. It's about the community saying, 'We see you, we see your effort, and we want to walk the journey with you,' said Councillor Kim. 'You didn't get here by accident. I suspect, Keil; that behind this award is a story ' a story of persistence, of showing up when it would have been easier not to, of carrying ambition alongside uncertainty, and still choosing to move forward. That takes courage, and it takes resilience ' the kind that doesn't always get applause, but absolutely deserves recognition. [This] grant is not a handout, it's an investment ' an investment in your potential, your vision, and your future

contribution to this community.

Aurora is stronger when young men and women like you are empowered to grow, to lead, and to build something meaningful, whether that's a career, a business, or a new path entirely. I hope you will carry this moment with you. On the days when things feel heavy or progress feels slow, remember that this community believes in you. We're cheering you on, and we're excited to see where you take this next chapter.

Programs like Power Forward matter because they don't just talk about opportunity, they create it. They remove barriers, they open doors, and they remind us that talent is everywhere, even when opportunity isn't. This is what community looks like. It's not just policies or plans, it's people supporting people, it's mentorship, it's encouragement, it's standing behind one another and saying your success matters to us.

Added Mayor Mrakas: I think we're all going to be watching for you and seeing how you're going to represent Aurora on the world stage because I can see a lot of things in your future. You're a promising young man and we're very proud of you.

Phiona and the entire Aurora Black Community Association, you guys do phenomenal work and we really appreciate the work that you do. We're very proud that you've partnered together to bring forward a lot of these activities and events to really uplift our community.

By Brock Weir
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