

Residents re-dedicate efforts to cast light into darkness at Hanukkah event



2024 was a rare year in which the start of Hanukkah coincided with Christmas, and on the third day of Hanukkah, the community gathered at Aurora Town Square to celebrate the Jewish festival of lights.

The Town's annual Menorah Lighting Ceremony, which was presided over by Rabbi Yossi Hecht of Chabad Aurora, looked a little bit different this year ? moving from its regular base at Town Hall to its new home at Town Square ? and Hecht was joined at the occasion by a range of dignitaries, including Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MP Leah Taylor Roy, Aurora Mayor Tom Mrakas and local Councillors.

?Tonight, as a community, as a family, we come together with one message ? unified: we will continue to be that shining light in our life,? said Hecht. ?We will continue to spread goodness and kindness.?

Noting the difficulties the Jewish community experienced over the course of 2024 with a significant rise in antisemitism across the country, he said the ?spark? within each of us ?will illuminate the world? and the light will burn far.?

?It will have an effect on the community around us, for the people around us, for the world around us, and in our own way we'll make the world a better place ? each and every one of us,? he said.

In turn, MP Taylor Roy said being a ?shining light? in the world is ?so needed right now in our communities, in our world? and the individual has the power to make a tangible difference.

?Light does win over darkness,? she said. ?The idea of rededicating ourselves to that is extremely important. Right now, with the rise of antisemitism and with the hate we're seeing here and around the world, we need to rededicate ourselves to fighting that and to ensuring that in our community, in Aurora, we do everything we can to stop it when we see it, to help those we felt were being hurt by any discrimination.?

Added Mayor Mrakas: ?The reality is that all of us as individuals, families, and as a community will face great adversity in our lives and be forced to overcome numerous challenges. Hanukkah celebrates the resilience that comes with enduring hope and the amazing and transformative things that can happen when we choose optimism over pessimism?. Hanukkah is also about the strength of community, [a reminder] of how grateful we are in Aurora to have such a strong community, full of an active and engaged residents? who care deeply about building a Town supporting one another. I am particularly grateful that we're home to such a vibrant Jewish community that continues to make meaningful and lasting contributions to Aurora.

?While Hanukkah is a time of joy and celebration, it is also important to recognize the challenges that many members of our community face, especially during times of conflict and rising antisemitism. We cannot ignore the troubling rise in hate, intolerance and division we have seen here and around the world. Antisemitism has no place in Aurora, nor in any society that values equity, inclusion, and human rights. This celebration is a reminder of the importance of standing together, of continuing to foster understanding and building a community where everyone feels safe, respected, and supported. Together, let us commit to being the light that overcomes darkness and the hope that counters despair.?

By Brock Weir