

Truth & Reconciliation Day to be honoured with two events Saturday

Aurorans will have two ways to mark National Day for Truth & Reconciliation on Saturday with a double-bill of events at Town Park.

The day of reflection will begin with an interactive community activity from 9 a.m. to 12 noon, where people will be invited to leave an orange handprint on picnic tables that will be placed in a local park ?demonstrating the Town's commitment to never forgetting the children? who perished in residential schools.

After a break, periods of reflection will return to Town Park at 6 p.m. for a community gathering led by Anishinaabe Grandmother Kim Wheatley, Elder Pat Floody, Ancestral Knowledge Keeper Raiden Levesque and, new this year, spoken word poet Sarah Lewis.

Both events are hosted by the Town of Aurora but have been developed in consultation with Wheatley, who has been an integral person helping guide Aurora on its own path to Truth & Reconciliation.

?The sign of meaningful reconciliation is when we also need to step up and come forward with concepts to demonstrate that we are listening, we are learning. Even us as individuals within the Town as we grow on this journey, even our knowledge one year ago to what it is today is stronger,? says Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora. ?The Town of Aurora is very proud and fortunate to work with our Anishinaabe consultant Kim Wheatley, who provides great guidance, but she also wants to charge us with the empowerment to also connect the dots: what can we bring to the table, what work can we do today in addition versus? she doesn't just give us a laundry list [of things to do]. That's not meaningful work; learning, acquiring throughout the year, and then coming together and developing a plan? then we go to [Wheatley] and say this is what we were thinking of doing. From there, the plans are more collaborative.

?When you spoke about voices, you will actually not hear from any Town voices at the gathering on September 30 because it is not our voice that matters; it's our voice and our time to listen. This is where we, even us as staff, we're also an audience that night as well. This is another teaching moment for us. Despite that we're working hard to put the gathering together and make the landscape available, we also have an opportunity to learn, too.?

Nichole Campsall, Cultural Development Coordinator for the Town of Aurora, agrees, adding it is not the job of Indigenous peoples to help non-Indigenous peoples in this way, but it's our job to learn.

?We reach out to the Chippewas of Georgina Island for support with certain ideas but we're also very aware it is on us and not them ? and they might not always be available to assist and support; when they are it is great, but we continue to be out there and do the work, plan the gatherings and work as a community,? says Campsall.

?This is a good opportunity for reflection, and the fact that these activities are hands-on?in the morning portion where [residents] are actually going to have to sit and reflect as they do the art activities? I am hoping the process will give families and parents something to continue the conversation past this day. It's so important that it is the day to recognize National Truth & Reconciliation Day, but it is not a one-day item. It is something we should be taking steps towards all the time.?

Adds Ware: ?One thing I am constantly humbled but also very proud to be a part of the growth here is each of the Indigenous-specific programs and endeavours that we have put on together, which Nichole and I have worked really closely together in June, is the growth and the knowledge of the community. When they're coming to our activities, we think we need to maybe teach them and see? but they're coming with a greater knowledge base than maybe I had anticipated and it goes to show you that it is not just the Town providing activities, it shows you that humanity and our community is also doing the work, too.

?Everyone is invited. The space is for everyone and for people who might be too shy to come out, or may not know how to act when they come out, this is about including the community because the community includes everybody. It is stepping out of your comfort

zone and learning about something that is horrifically uncomfortable but you're doing it in the unity of a community that obviously cares about each other.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter