

Truth & Reconciliation Day to be marked Monday at Aurora Town Square

National Day for Truth & Reconciliation will be marked with several events in Aurora this Monday, September 30.

The poignant occasion, which is also Orange Shirt Day, will see several initiatives unfold hosted by the Town of Aurora, the Aurora Public Library and the Aurora Cultural Centre.

Observances will begin at Aurora Town Square at 5.30 p.m. with a gathering led by Anishinaabe Grandmother Kim Wheatley, Ancestral Knowledge Keeper Raiden Levesque and Elder Pat Floody, and featuring a sacred fire.

At 7.30, events will move indoors as the Aurora Cultural Centre presents A Concert for Truth & Reconciliation in the new Performance Hall, hosted by Dr. Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux and featuring Zeegwon Shilling, Jeff Monague a.k.a. Myiingan Minanaakwhe, and the Evan Redsky Band.

Additional programs will be offered by the Aurora Public Library both preceding and on the day itself.

On Saturday, September 28, at 1 p.m. at the Aurora Town Square Performance Hall, the Library (APL) will host a screening of the documentary WaaPaKe, followed by a discussion. On the day itself, virtual screenings will be offered of the film Wilfrid Buck.

For generations, the suffering of residential school Survivors has radiated outward, impacting Indigenous families and communities, says the APL, which has undertaken a year-long program, Indigenous Teachings, to shine a light on Indigenous authors, filmmakers and much more. Dr. Jules Arita Koostachin's deeply personal documentary moves beyond intergenerational trauma, with an invitation to unravel the tangled threads of silence and unite in collective freedom and power. This documentary is part of a broader initiative to explore and address the lasting impacts of residential schools on Indigenous communities. Additionally, the evening will feature a film discussion following the screening.

Lisa Jackson's portrait of Cree Elder Wilfred Buck moves between earth and sky, past and present, bringing to life ancient teachings of Indigenous astronomy and cosmology to tell a story that spans generations. Adapted from Buck's rollicking memoir, 'I Have Lived Four Lives', the film weaves together stories from his life, including his harrowing young years of displacement and addiction.

As the APL team worked to finalize details on the program, they shared the excitement of having these learning opportunities so close to home.

That respect when you sit with elders, you're not asking questions? you should have your mind free and empty, being present to listen and absorb, says APL's Nelia Pacheco of the documentary programs. If you come in with a full mind, you're not absorbing it?both films were, to me, about being present. It's all about what's happening at this point in time and being accountable.

It's all about accountability and if we don't own up to it, we can't heal and move on.

Jodi Marr, APL's Acting CEO, says the Indigenous Teachings program has been a success in spurring a conversation, whether it's watching a documentary or while wrapping a book as part of the Canadian Library Project, which aims to shine a light on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

It's not just a film to watch, people are feeling like there's something they can do and learn from and give back with, says Marr. It's been really nice to connect in a more thoughtful way with Truth & Reconciliation and start to consider those things as an organization as well with our community.

Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora, agrees there is so much to learn and listen about.

?With the 5.30 portion of the Truth & Reconciliation Gathering, it's really going to be focusing on the Truth ? the truths that are hard to hear, the truths that are hard to wrap your head around, which is important with the work that we all need to do in terms of taking meaningful steps towards reconciliation.

?We have been lucky to have this tri-partnership (with the APL and Cultural Centre) all focused on the same objective and the same goal, which is to create a space where everyone feels welcome, everyone knows they are invited and welcome to attend with some key elements that will help us learn more while we listen ? and to be able to process, reflect, and be able to continue that movement forward.?

For more information on this week's observances, visit aurora.ca/truthandreconciliation.

By Brock Weir