

One Book One Aurora sparks human rights discussion next week



By Brock Weir

The face of Aurora is changing with exceptional growth in the northeast, but how can Aurora keep from becoming a splintered town??

That is the question that has been on the minds of a number of community leaders this month as they prepare to tackle that issue, and many others, head-on in 'The Changing Face of Canada,' an open forum on the richness of and challenges facing our community. Hosted by the Aurora Public Library as part of their One Book One Aurora campaign, the panel, which takes place at the Library Thursday, September 29, from 7-9 p.m., features Mbalu Lumor, Manager of Community Engagement for the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture, Art Rekhtin, Manager of Newcomer Services at Welcome Centre Newmarket, York Regional Police Constable Ali Lalani of the department's Diversity & Cultural Resources Unit, and former MP Costas Menegakis, who served as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

One Book One Aurora is the Aurora Public Library's campaign to get as many people as possible reading from the same book. This year's selection is *Under the Visible Life* by Kim Echlin.

The music-fuelled novel touches, for better or worse, many aspects of the what it means to be a newcomer and the forces that drive people to make life-altering decisions, including pressures of intermarriage in interwar Canada and in Afghanistan.

'We all know Aurora is changing,' says Reccia Mandelcorn of the Aurora Public Library. 'We know our population is changing. We want to be able to reach out to the richness of newcomers in our community and we want to be able to learn about their challenges, we want to be able to learn about what they can help us with, and we really want to make living in Aurora and living in Canada a very positive experience.'

Over the last few years, Ms. Mandelcorn says she has had the opportunity to touch upon this very issue at several community discussion groups where a number of similar themes were raised, including making sure everybody is a part of the diversity in the community, challenges facing newcomers entering the job market, and addressing any inkling of 'subtle racism.'

'So many newcomers are moving into the Northeast Quadrant, how do we bring them in without becoming a splintered town?? she ponders, noting this too is a common theme. 'Because of some of those conversations I have had with various different community members, and because in *Under the Visible Life* [addresses the] whole theme of immigration and racism because of the experiences the two main protagonists, we thought this would be a really great opportunity to have a panel discussion on the changing face of Canada and trying to address this from both a local Aurora aspect and also from [all levels].

'We got together a really high level panel for those who are involved in this from different ways.'

Next Thursday's discussion will be moderated by former councillor Alison Collins-Mrakas, Senior Policy Advisor on Research Ethics at York University (and also a columnist in *The Auroran*). Ms. Mandelcorn says in preliminary discussions with Ms.

Collins-Mrakas, she knows she will be able to 'generate fair, open and interesting discussion' on such an important topic.

'The excitement is always in everybody talking about something so important with each other,' says Ms. Mandelcorn. 'We all have something important to say about our country, our freedom, and other cultures, and wanting to build a really positive, rich

community and society. Let's use the threads [in the book] as an opportunity to spark a conversation.?
For more information, visit www.onebookoneaurora.com.