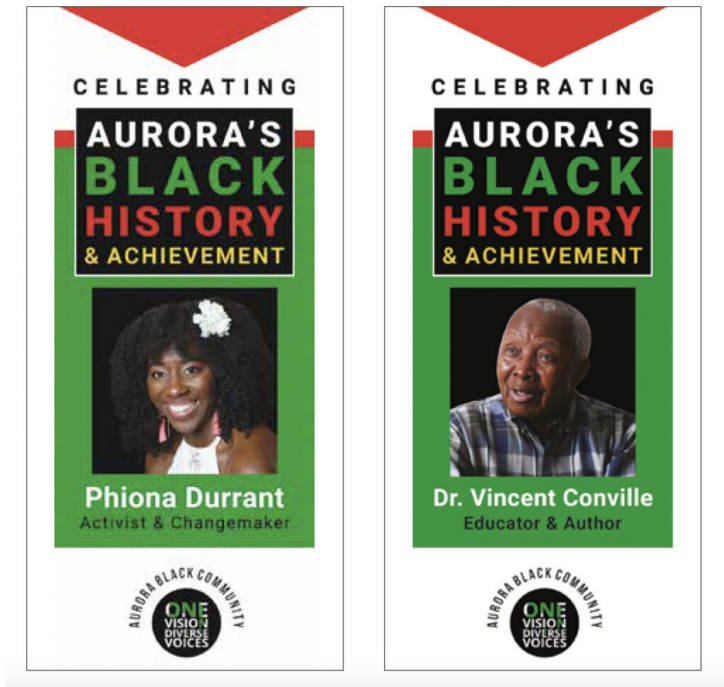


Street banners to celebrate Black excellence in community for Black History Month



As dignitaries prepare to descend on Town Hall on February 1 to help raise the Pan-African Flag and mark the start of Black History Month, other pennants will soon pop up around Aurora to celebrate Black excellence in the community.

An initiative of the Aurora Black Community (ABC) Association, the banners will feature several members of the community, some of whom go about their work unheralded, who have made a difference ? including Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) Constables Jodi-Ann Morrison and Alvin Morrison, Aurora Black Caucus founder Milton Hart, ABC founder Phiona Durrant, volunteer Ron Kellman, musician George St. Kitts, and author Dr. Vincent Conville.

The idea for the banners really took root in 2021 when Durrant began working with the Aurora Museum and Archives to identify Black individuals, such as business owners, who have contributed to the Town's history.

Little information was found in the municipal archives, but they were undeterred and sought memories of residents who have been living in Aurora for generations.

Last year, the ABC hoped to make the banner project a reality, featuring examples of Black art, perhaps even a representation of Canada's most recent \$10 bill featuring Nova Scotia civil rights pioneer and entrepreneur Viola Desmond, but that had to be put on the backburner, says Durrant.

?People started to reach out and connect with other people in the community, older folks who have been here over 30 years and talking about that existence of people [working in] food, being a teacher, working at the School Board ? but how come nobody knows you guys?? says Durrant, recalling the start of the conversation. ?One gentlemen [we're saluting] is Dr. Vincent Conville who, when I met him, was telling me how long he has lived here, of singing in the choir of a local church, of writing his memoir.?

?I would like to put up Black History Month banners with names of people who have been here ? not because they did anything super; Rosa Parks didn't do anything so big. She said she was just tired and wanted to sit down! It's simple and it took courage ?

something that is bigger than what we intended. We just wanted to show simple people in our community who have made some impact, no matter how small.?

For Durrant, it's all about the people who ?are holding up our hands, motivating us, encouraging us, and standing beside us ? having the courage and bravery with us.?

?When we put this together, we want people to know that next year, when you put names forward, and every year we want to add just three people to make sure it is intentional; tell us about them and why they should be represented and why you would want to see them as part of the face of Aurora's history.

?It's not just about addressing this kind of historical [absence] it is that commitment to creating a true, diverse, equitable, inclusive community. Before you know it, this will branch out from beyond the Black community, where we can see the Asian community and say, hey, you're a part of what makes Aurora inclusive and diverse. It's something I think will have a ripple effect that will be beautiful and we will see where it goes!?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter