



Aurora Public Library Board

MEETING

Wednesday, February 19, 2020

7:00 p.m.

Marjorie Andrews Room, Aurora Public Library

AGENDA

1. Adoption of Agenda
2. Declaration of Conflict of Interest
3. Minutes of:
 - .1 January 15, 2020 Meeting (enclosure)
4. Items for Consideration
 - .1 Bill 132 – Proposed Change to Library Board Meeting Schedule (enclosure)
5. Library CEO Updates
 - .1 CEO Updates (verbal report)
6. General Business Information/Questions (enclosure)
 - .1 APL Updates
7. Resolution to Move into Closed Session
 - .1 Labour Relations or employee negotiations
8. Member Announcements
9. Date of Next Meeting: **Wednesday, March 18, 2020**
10. Adjournment

**** Please advise Maida Rae of regrets for attendance, by noon on February 19th at 905-727-9494 ext. 209 or mrae@aurorapl.ca.**

Dates to Remember:

Thurs. Feb 20 | 7 pm | In Conversation: Being Black in Canada | Magna Room |

Sat. Feb 22 & Sat. Mar 7 | 1:30 pm | Aurora Winter Blues Festival Pop-Up Concerts | Living Room |

Thurs. Mar 5 | 6:30 | Show Your Character – Anime and Creative Writing Workshop |

Sat. Mar 7 | 2 pm | Paper Bag Princess Day |

Sun. Mar 8 | 1 pm | International Women's Day Celebrations | Magna Room & Living Room |

Mon. Mar 16 – Sat. Mar 21 | March Break Mania | Living Room / Magna and Lebovic Rooms |

Please note the Creative Studio will be closed temporarily from February 18 to March 13.



Aurora Public Library Board

MINUTES of MEETING

Wednesday, January 15, 2020

The Aurora Public Library Board held its regular meeting on Wednesday, January 15, 2020 in the Marjorie Andrews Room of the Aurora Public Library, 15145 Yonge Street, Aurora, Ontario.

Present: John Clement, Tom Connor (Chair), Councillor Sandra Humfryes, Councillor Harold Kim, Adam Mobbs (Vice Chair), Marie Rankel, Ken Turriff

Regrets: Councillor Sandra Humfryes

Chief Executive Officer: Bruce Gorman

Staff: Mario Baleno (Acting) Manager, IT; Reccia Mandelcorn, Manager, Community Collaboration; Jodi Marr, Manager, Customer Opportunity; Ashley Nunn-Smith, Manager, Content, Access & Innovation; Maida Rae, HR Coordinator/EA (recorder)

The Chair called the meeting to order at 07:10 p.m.

1. Adoption of the amended Agenda

MOTION: **20.01.01**
Moved by: M. Rankel
Seconded by: J. Clement
CARRIED

THAT the amended Agenda be approved

2. Election of the Library Board Executive 2020

The CEO acted as the meeting Chair for this item of business. The position of Chair and Vice-Chair to the Library Board were declared vacant and the position of SOLS Trustee Representative was declared open.

MOTION: **20.01.02**
Moved by: A. Mobbs
Seconded by: M. Rankel
CARRIED

THAT Tom Connor be nominated for the position of Chair of the Library Board

Councillor Harold Kim nominated Adam Mobbs for the position of Chair. Adam Mobbs respectfully declined the nomination.

The meeting Chair called for further nominations. There being no further nominations, Tom Connor was acclaimed to the position of Chair.

Tom Connor assumed the Chair for the remainder of the meeting.

MOTION: **20.01.03**
Moved by: K. Turriff
Seconded by: M. Rankel
CARRIED

THAT Adam Mobbs be nominated
for the position of Vice-Chair of
the Library Board

The Chair called for further nominations. There being no further nominations, Adam Mobbs was acclaimed to the position of Vice-Chair.

MOTION : **20.01.04**
Moved by: J. Clement
Seconded by: A. Mobbs
CARRIED

THAT Marie Rankel be nominated
for the position of SOLS Trustee
Representative

The Chair called for further nominations. There being no further nominations, Marie Rankel was acclaimed to the position of SOLS Trustee Representative.

3. Disclosure of Interest

4. Approval of Minutes:

.1 Regular meeting of December 11, 2019

MOTION: **20.01.05**
Moved by: K. Turriff
Seconded by: A. Mobbs
CARRIED

THAT the Minutes of the
December 11, 2019 meeting be
approved

5. Reports

.1 ***Fourth Quarter Operations Report SR2020.01***

A staff report was issued prior to the meeting.

MOTION: **20.01.06**
Moved by: M. Rankel
Seconded by: Councillor H. Kim
CARRIED

THAT the Fourth Quarter
Operations Report to December
31, 2019 be received as
information

.2 Fourth Quarter Use Indicators Report SR2020.02

A staff report was issued prior to the meeting.

MOTION: **20.01.07**

Moved by: Councillor H. Kim

Seconded by: M. Rankel

CARRIED

THAT the Aurora Public Library Board receives the Fourth Quarter Use Indicators Report to December 31, 2019 as information

.3 Annual Health and Safety Report SR2020.03

A staff report was issued prior to the meeting.

MOTION: **20.01.08**

Moved by: K. Turriff

Seconded by: M. Rankel

CARRIED

THAT the Library Board receive the Annual Health and Safety Report for 2019 as information; and endorse the attached Aurora Public Library Board Health and Safety policy statements

6. Items for Consideration

.1 Circulation and Fees Policy Report SR2020.04

A staff report was issued prior to the meeting.

MOTION: **20.01.09**

Moved by: A. Mobbs

Seconded by: Councillor H. Kim

CARRIED

THAT the revised Aurora Public Library Circulation and Fees Policy dated January 15, 2020 be approved

.2 SOLS Trustee Report

A verbal report was provided at the meeting.

MOTION: **20.01.10**

Moved by: K. Turriff

Seconded by: A. Mobbs

CARRIED

THAT the verbal SOLS Trustee verbal report be received as information

M. Rankel indicated it was a well attended event, with approximately 40 libraries participating. Key discussion points from the meeting included the importance of developing strong working relationships between the Library CEO and Board Chair, succession planning, and recent developments with other public library boards.

7. Library CEO Updates

.1 *CEO Updates*

A verbal report was provided at the meeting.

MOTION: **20.01.11**

Moved by: J. Clement

Seconded: K. Turriff

CARRIED

THAT the Library CEO Updates verbal report be received as information

There is now a formal agreement in place between the Library and the Library Café. It is a three-year agreement with a six month out clause.

Representatives from +VG Architects presented findings from the Growth Accommodation Study consultations to the Library ELT group in mid-December. Two concepts were presented, and ELT has provided feedback. A hybrid of the two concepts will be developed further. +VG will present architectural renderings to the Board in 2020.

B. Gorman attended the December 17th Town Council meeting to speak in support of Library Square. Council has approved the proposed next steps.

B. Gorman's staff reorganization is ongoing. The most recent change involves updating the title of Discovery Assistant to Information and Programming Specialist. The staffing complement for this position will also increase from 7 to 8.5 to enable additional programming and support increases to open hours.

B. Gorman and J. Rocca are working with Town of Aurora staff to improve procurement processes, enabling the Library to access Town of Aurora vendor of record lists to achieve better pricing on certain items.

The Town of Aurora is implementing a Human Resources Information System (HRIS). M. Rae and J. Rocca represent APL on the project team, and B. Gorman was recently appointed to the Steering Committee for this project.

APL will once again host a Hackathon in 2020. Library staff have secured grants to support this event, and the Town of Aurora management team have been asked to consider useful app ideas to inform this year's Hackathon event.

8. General Business Information/Questions

.1 *APL Updates*

Articles and photographs were issued prior to the meeting.

MOTION: **20.01.12**

Moved by: K. Turriff

Seconded by: J. Clement

CARRIED

THAT the APL Updates be received as information

Newspaper articles and media coverage from late mid-December to early January were provided that highlight APL's programs and services.

9. Resolution to Move into Closed Session

MOTION: **20.01.13**
Moved by: J. Clement
Seconded by: Councillor H. Kim
CARRIED

THAT the Board move into Closed Session to discuss Labour Relations or employee negotiations

At 8:10 p.m., the Board moved into Closed Session.

MOTION: **20.01.14**
Moved by: M. Rankel
Seconded by: Councillor H. Kim
CARRIED

THAT the Board return to Open Session

At 8:26 p.m., the Board returned to Open Session.

10. Member Announcements

11. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, February 19, 2020 at 7:00 p.m.

12. Adjournment

MOTION: **20.01.15**
Moved by: K. Turriff
Seconded by: A. Mobbs
CARRIED

THAT the meeting be adjourned at 8:27 p.m.

T. Connor
Chair

B. Gorman
Chief Executive Officer



Aurora Public Library Board

REPORT SR2020.05

SUBJECT: Bill 132 – Proposed change to Library Board Meeting Schedule

FROM: Bruce Gorman, C.E.O.

DATE: February 19, 2020

RECOMMENDATION

That the Board approve a revised annual meeting schedule to include nine meetings, effective January 1, 2021.

BACKGROUND

On Oct. 28, 2019 the Ontario government tabled its proposed red tape and regulatory burden legislation, Bill 132 – Better for People, Smarter for Business Act, 2019 (Omnibus red tape / burden reduction bill). It is the third in a series of bills through Ontario's Open for Business Action Plan. The bill introduced new measures to further ease the regulatory burden to help businesses, people, schools, hospitals, libraries and municipalities. The bill included two proposed amendments to the *Public Libraries Act* impacting public library boards.

Regarding the second proposal, related to subsection 16(1) of the Ontario Public Library Act, the amendment would reduce the minimum number of meetings a public library board is required to hold each year. The bill proposed to reduce the minimum number of meetings to 4 per year (from the current minimum of 10). The general understanding is that the intent is to provide more flexibility for public library boards to determine the appropriate number of meetings needed for their local circumstances. Public library boards will still be able to hold regular meetings more frequently than the mandatory minimum, and can also declare special and emergency meetings accordingly as set out under the *Public Libraries Act*.

In relation to this proposed amendment, the Board was asked to respond to a survey undertaken by the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries (FOPL). Over 350 responded representing a cross-section of Ontario's public libraries. Results of the survey included that:

- Public library boards remain an essential component of ensuring that local libraries are community-led, responsive to evolving local needs, and are effectively governed.

- Most public library board members are unpaid and serve in a part-time capacity, significantly reducing the number of mandatory meetings threatens the ability of many boards to operate effectively and in a timely manner.
- While many respondents acknowledged a reduction in the mandatory minimum was reasonable, there was significant concern that the proposed minimum of 4 meetings was too few and unworkable. **A minimum of 7-8 meetings per year was the most preferred option.**

The efforts of the survey and the thoughtful considered responses were notable.

The bill received royal assent on December 10, 2019 as follows:

Bill 132 Schedule 12 -- Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries

Public Libraries Act

Currently, under subsection 10 (1) of the Public Libraries Act, a person must be a Canadian citizen to qualify to be appointed as a member of a public library board. The section is amended to provide that a person who is a permanent resident of Canada may also qualify to be appointed as a member of a board.

Currently, subsection 16 (1) of the Act requires public library boards to hold regular meetings once a month for at least 10 months each year. The subsection is re-enacted to require boards to hold a minimum of seven regular meetings in each year.

CONCLUSION

As a result of this new legislation, the Board is asked to consider reducing the number of regularly scheduled annual meetings from the current ten to nine. Given the proximity of the January meeting to the holiday season, the work of the Board would not be impacted with the elimination of January meetings from future meeting schedules.

*Bruce Gorman
Chief Executive Officer*

Acclaimed novel "Scarborough" selected for One Book One Aurora 2020



Catherine Hernandez

Contributed photo

By Brock Weir

It is said that the best authors write what they know, letting their personal experiences inform what they put down on the page. That's exactly what author Catherine Hernandez did in her acclaimed debut novel, *Scarborough*. But what she put down on the page also helped challenge her previously-held misconceptions about the Toronto neighbourhood she returned to, providing a voice to individuals who had, unbeknownst to her, felt voiceless along the way.

Ms. Hernandez exploration of the diverse Toronto borough is the 2020 selection for the Aurora Public Library's One Book One Aurora program.

One Book One Aurora is the Aurora Public Library's (APL) annual campaign to get all of Aurora reading from the same page. In the months ahead, small lending libraries will be popping up around the community laden with copies of Ms. Hernandez' novel to pick up free-of-charge to read, return and/or pass along to other readers.

A year-long series of programming based on the themes of the novel will also be rolled out, themes of which can be both challenging and uplifting.

"Scarborough is about community, so I am always happy when a community band together to go and look at a piece of literature, or any kind of piece of art, and then share their thoughts with one another," says Ms. Hernandez. "Any possibility for community members to convene and share space intellectually and physically is, for me, just a wonderful opportunity."

A finalist for the Trillium Book Award and the City of Toronto Book Award, *Scarborough* is billed as the story of an inner-city community "suffering under the weight of poverty, drugs, crime and urban blight. Scarborough, the novel, employs a multitude of voices to tell the story of a tight-knit neighbourhood under fire: among them, Victor, a black artist harassed by police; Winsum, a West Indian restaurant owner struggling to keep it together; and Hina, a Muslim school worker who witnesses first-hand the impact of poverty on education. And

then there are the three kids who work to rise above a system that consistently fails them: Bing, a gay Filipino boy who lives under the shadow of his father's mental illness; Sylvie, Bing's best friend, a Native girl whose family struggles to find a permanent home to live in; and Laura, whose history of neglect by her mother is destined to repeat itself with her father."

Speaking to The Aurorean of the themes she hopes the community is able to explore through the reading of her work, Ms. Hernandez says the "number one thing to consider as community members is whose needs are the priority?"

"Why are those people made priority more often than not?" she asks. "Let's look at privilege and what does that mean for access to basic needs? Those kinds of questions can be very difficult for people to deal with, to question, 'Why do I have to more access than others?' and then to consider, 'Why are those systems in place that make those different levels of access present?' That's the number one thing I want people to take away when it comes to my book because one character who is the facilitator at the literacy centre, she is dealing with a system that is really working against her and she is a frontline worker who understands the needs of a community and everything she does that is right, that is just, is actually against policy and against the rules. I think we just need to consider why those rules are in place. Who is it serving? If we ask ourselves those questions, I think we will build strong communities."

Ms. Hernandez asked herself those very questions when she found herself living in Scarborough. Having grown up in the community since she was 10-years-old, she says she always felt it was a place full of stories, but didn't think "those stories had any real value." Earlier writings she said, made "caricatures" of people living in the community and "some of the living I have done in the past I am not writing I have done in the past I am not entirely proud of because my politics were definitely different back then."

"I was always extremely ashamed of my neighbourhood just because it was low income and I always thought Downtown Toronto was the place to be, especially as an artist," she says. "I always felt like I was on my way out of Scarborough and when living downtown my writing sort of had a surface quality to it, a really superficial quality. I had these clever moments, but I never felt like it could get any deeper when it came to character development. What I didn't know at the time, because of where I was right near Queen's Quay, my writing was sort of stifled by the superficial nature of the people who are downtown. In Scarborough, there is really nothing to hide between us."

"A lot of time when we're sharing space, I find the conversations are very in-depth and there's no pretense, nothing to hide behind. The quality of conversation between you is so much more genuine and I didn't know any of this until my daughter and I actually had to flee an abusive relationship. We had to come to Scarborough and live with my parents

and sister for about six months. We were in precarious housing until I got a basement apartment where I started a home daycare.

"I remember being in a room with all of our belongings and one of those grocery carts and thinking to myself, I am back at square one? I have to rebuild all over again, not knowing this was to be the emphasis of writing this book because when I returned to Scarborough there was this voice inside of me saying, 'Be still. Stop thinking that Scarborough is a place you escape and be here.' I did exactly that. I made Scarborough my home instead of being ashamed of it and I decided to really and truly listen to the conversations that were very familiar to me."

Next Week: Ms. Hernandez re-discovers her voice, and finds the voice of an entire community.

Caledon East dentist loses wife and daughter in Ukraine plane crash near Tehran, Iran

Dr. Parisa Eghbalian and Reera Esmaeilion among 63 Canadians killed in plane crash

News 05:30 PM by [Matthew Strader](#) Caledon Enterprise



Dr. Hamed Esmaeilion, of Log Home Dental in Caledon East, is mourning the loss of his wife and daughter, victims of the Ukraine International Airlines flight PS752 crash in Tehran, Iran. - Leanne Robertson photo



This photo from Facebook shows Dr. Parisa Eghbalian with her husband Dr. Hamed Esmaeilion of Log Home Dental in Caledon East. Eghbalian was a victim of the flight PS752 crash in Iran, along with the couple's young daughter, Reera. - Facebook photo

Dr. Hamed Esmaeilion of Log Home Dental in Caledon East is mourning the loss of his wife, Dr. Parisa Eghbalian, and daughter Reera Esmaeilion, victims of the flight PS752 Ukraine International Airlines flight that crashed just outside of Tehran, Iran on this morning.

The flight took off from an airport in Iran's capital city of Tehran and was bound for Kyiv, the capital city of Ukraine.

Log Home Dental office manager Leanne Robertson said she had spoken with Esmaeilion and he had given permission to the clinic to confirm to media the loss of his family, and that they were on the trip to attend his wife's sisters engagement party.

Robertson said the dental office's thoughts are with the family but hesitated to comment further until more is known.

According to reports, flight PS752 went down minutes after takeoff with what officials so far have said was a suspected mechanical issue.

The Boeing 737-800 was carrying 176 people, including 63 Canadians. There were no survivors reported.

Esmaeilion and Eghbalian also ran Aurora E&E Dentistry in Aurora together. According to that clinic's webpage, Eghbalian was born and raised in Iran, and graduated from Tabriz University of Medical Science in 2001. Prior to immigrating to Canada in 2010, she worked as an associate for nine years. In her spare time, she enjoyed reading and watching movies with her husband and young daughter.

Aurora Public Library made a post to Facebook Jan. 9 expressing its deepest condolences to the Iranian community who lost their loved ones on the flight.

The post also included a photo of Eghbalian taken in 2018, which "was on the occasion of a generous donation of picture books she and (Esmaeilion), made" to give to Farsi-speaking children.

Manager of community collaborations for the APL, Reccia Mandelcorn, described them as a "wonderful family" that wanted to help their community.

Reera was a member at the APL, which inspired her parents to donate many picture books in gift bags, which were given out for free at the children's desk.

"It was a very nice thing to do for the community and our library," Mandelcorn said.

— *with files from Aileen Zangouei*

DENTIST LOSES WIFE AND DAUGHTER IN PLANE CRASH IN IRAN

57 CANADIANS KILLED WHEN PLANE SHOT DOWN

MATTHEW STRADER
mstrader@
caledonenterprise.com

Dr. Hamed Esmaeilion of Log Home Dental in Caledon East is mourning the loss of his wife, Dr. Parisa Eghbalian, and daughter Reera Esmaeilion, victims of the flight PS752 Ukraine International Airlines flight that crashed just outside of Tehran, Iran on Jan. 8.

The flight took off from an airport in Iran's capital city of Tehran and was bound for Kyiv, the capital city of Ukraine.

Log Home Dental office

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— with files from
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STORY BEHIND THE STORY

Following the devastating plane crash in Iran, reporters Matthew Strader and Aileen Zangouei pooled their resources to find out how the tragic deaths of Dr. Parisa Eghbalian and her daughter Reera Esmaeilion were affecting their communities.



Leanne Robertson photo

Dr. Hamed Esmaeilion, of Aurora E&E Dentistry and Log Home Dental in Caledon, is mourning the loss of his wife, Dr. Parisa Eghbalian, and daughter, Reera Esmaeilion, victims of the Ukraine International Airlines crash in Iran.



Welcome to Library Land

Reccia Mandelcorn

In what has become an annual tradition, The Auroran announced the OneBookOneAurora 2020 selection in its first issue of the new year.

The backstory to OBOA, now in its seventh iteration, is the "If All of Seattle Read the Same Book" pilot in 1998. The concept was one of expanding a localized book discussion group to cover an entire city. Over the past 22 years, libraries across North America have put their own spin on this initiative with the common goals of building community and promoting literacy.

In Library Land we all share, so I approached Brian Francis, author, CBC personality and Manager at Toronto Public Library for advice on how to run a successful One Book campaign at APL. Choose the book wisely, he advised. Don't be too narrow when you consider the interests of your community and make certain you have sufficient threads with which to establish rich programming. It's the programming that drives a successful One Book project.

Choosing the featured book is always a big responsibility as it has to excite and sustain interest for months. Leading up to the final selection, I only read Canadian books by authors in commuting distance to Aurora. I speak with people in the publishing industry, consider reviews and awards, draw upon recommendations from staff and community readers and finally, create a shortlist which I share with generous Beta Readers. The chosen book must be easily accessible and affordable, available in multiple formats and the author must be able to present at a grand finale "Meet the Author" event.

This year's selection is Scarborough by author, activist and performer Catherine Hernandez. I fell in love with the book at first read.

Hernandez set her novel in the vibrant, culturally diverse neighbourhood of Scarborough, offering a raw, empathetic glimpse into a community that somehow finds its dignity in unexpected places. Themes include the crisis in affordable housing, socio-economic inequity, opportunities for children on the autism spectrum, multiculturalism and challenges for members of the LGBTQ2S communities. Set in Scarborough, but not limited to this east end neighbourhood of Toronto, these are issues that affect every community - even those, like ours, that appear on the surface to be affluent.

Increasingly, many of us in Library Land see a responsibility of the public library to spark conversations that extend beyond our traditional role. Scarborough provides the literary platform for connection, discussion and perhaps to even effect action.

The local spin that APL takes is that we invite our community to not only participate in, but to contribute to this project. We set up a standalone website so that events can link back to the participating organizations.

If your organization is interested in presenting an event or workshop related to the themes of the book in our venue or yours, I'd love to hear from you at rmandelcorn@aurorapl.ca. To learn more about the project and to obtain multiple copies of Scarborough for your book club visit onebookoneaurora.com. Events will be added to the site in the Spring.

Scarborough is available at the Library in print and online at cloudLibrary. We invite you to be part of the journey as we explore the themes of this wonderful and original book.

Reccia Mandelcorn is the Manager, Community Collaboration at Aurora Public Library. The opinions expressed in this column reflect her personal thoughts about the engagement of community with their public library.

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LOVE ART IN FEBRUARY

YOU CAN MAKE ART YOUR VALENTINE THIS MONTH, WRITES ALEX KAROLYI



ALEX KAROLYI
Column

Make art your Valentine this February and let it take you out for an experience to remember. Not only will it distract you from the winter weather, it'll spark your zest for life and maybe even inspire you to embrace creativity a little bit tighter. There's a bit of something for everyone except for the groundhogs. We don't have any artsy events catered to them ... just yet.

February is Black History Month and Trinidad-born author Rita Cox is sharing her storytelling magic with the York Region public. She has performed for adults and children alike from all across North America, Europe, Brazil and the Caribbean. She now makes her way to the charming living room space at the Aurora

ra library. No stranger to a library setting, Cox began as a children's librarian in 1960. She is now a recipient of the Canadian Library Association Public Service Award and the Black Achievement Award. She additionally holds honorary doctorates from Wilfrid Laurier University and York University. If that wasn't impressive enough, in 1997 Cox was appointed a Member of the Order of Canada for her outstanding work in storytelling and literacy.

You are sure to delight in Cox's wizardry of words as she transports you to other times and places through the art of storytelling. Who knows? Her powerful prose and lyrical language skills might be enough to give even a groundhog pause.

Rita Cox Live!
Saturday, Feb. 1, 2 p.m. to 3 p.m.

FREE
Aurora Public Library
15145 Yonge St.
www.aurorapl.ca

February is also known as the time to spend with loved ones as we welcome Family Day. So gather your

grandparents and get them to Hesperus Village featuring seniors at the forefront of fashion.

This theatrical soiree presents workshops catered to accessorizing your best life through the power of colour, posture, breath and style. The catwalk highlights elders in their favourite outfit with a boost of fun-filled accessories to add to the drama. "We encourage everyone to wear their favourite outfit and even give the catwalk a trial run," said organizer Chandra Pepper.

The event is in the spirit of self-love and confidence boosting as modelling, style and fashion are paired with the senior public. "There will also be a tea party following the fashion show to demonstrate how NOT to eat like a model," jokes Pepper.

Feel Fab In Feb
Sunday, Feb. 9, 1 p.m. to 3 p.m.

FREE
Hesperus Village
1 Hesperus Rd. in Vaughan
www.shadowpaththeatre.ca

Leave it to Chorus York to remind us about the

month of love, heart-shaped boxes of chocolates and buying those dozen red roses as we celebrate Valentine's Day.

Netflix rom-coms and typical dinner reservations have been done time and time again and get zero points for originality. Instead dazzle your date with something special. Chorus York invites you to switch it up this Valentine's Day and fall in love with love. Set in a cosy cabaret ambience, this event stars cocktails, appetizers and you guessed it - love songs. Sweet sounds of the classical violin and guitar fill the room and are coupled with vocals and poetry. Factor in the wine and cheese and I'd call this a match made in heaven.

Friday, Feb. 14, 7 p.m. to 10 p.m.

Tickets \$50 (with \$20 tax receipt)
Richmond Hill Centre for the Performing Arts
10268 Yonge St.
www.rhcentre.ca

As we wait in high anticipation for Warton Willie to make the most important weather statement of the year, we can at least take comfort in the creative joys that our community has to offer.

Whether it's culture, family or romance you crave, York Region has it all. We may well be on our way to a swiftly approach-

YOUR OPINIONS

SIGN UP FOR OUR WEEKLY NEWSLETTER AT YORKREGION.COM

ing spring or bundling down for more wintry wonder. Regardless, you can celebrate everything February has in store with or without the groundhogs.

Alex Karolyi is the founding artistic director of Shadowpath Theatre Productions, a site-specific, York Region-based, professional theatre company. www.shadowpaththeatre.ca. Have a performing arts event coming up in York Region? Reach out to alex@shadowpaththeatre.ca.

Arts & Culture



Black history is made every day – not just February: Trailblazer

Library hosts “In Conversation” event February 20

February is Black History Month, but black history is made every day, says Tessa Benn-Ireland.

Ms. Benn-Ireland knows this from her own lived experience, having blazed a trail as the first African Canadian Trustee with the York Region District School Board in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

As Black History Month gets underway Friday, Ms. Benn-Ireland is set to join other Black community

leaders in a conversation at the Aurora Public Library called “Being Black in Canada.”

Set for February 20 at 7 p.m., the panel will also bring Jacqueline Benn-John, Executive Director of the Women’s Support Network of York Region and musician Glenn Marais together to discuss “contemporary challenges and celebrations experienced by Black people today” including race and economic mobility, systemic discrimination and the arts and culture scene.

Ms. Benn-Ireland, a recently retired Justice of the Peace, is a well-known community builder and education advocate with a passion for community involvement. In addition to her work as a Trustee, she worked as a school librarian before founding the Markham African Canadian Association.

“I believe in serving the community in which you live,” she says. “My parents always instilled in me that education is the key and that’s why I got involved in the community.”

As a Trustee, she was passionate about increasing parental involvement in the schools.

“It was about getting involved with the parents so that they’re not just opening up the door to send [their kids] to schools and opening up the door to welcome them back without asking what was going on at school and finding out what went on in terms of their work. I had the pulse of the community, and I felt as a parent in the community, regardless of ethnicity, I felt I would be there if the community needed someone to speak to.”

The panel for the February 20 In Conversation event was selected by Reccia Mandelcorn, Manager of Community Collaboration for

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Black history is made every day – not just February: Trailblazer

From page 10

the Aurora Public Library. Ms. Mandelcorn says each speaker was picked for their strong identities and their equally strong commitments to equity and justice.

“I wanted to celebrate Black History Month with intent – taking Aurora Public Library’s traditional acknowledgement with displays on the Underground Railroad and (mostly) American Civil Rights leaders to a different place,” she says. “This year, I wanted to hold conversation that brings a modern-day context to the understanding that Black history continues to evolve and that systemic discrimination and inequality in social and economic mobility continues to be a reality – in Canada and in York Region. And I also wanted to celebrate the incredible contributions Black artists continue to make on the arts and culture scene that we all enjoy.”

“I reached out to leaders in our local Black community for help – and they did not disappoint. We have a stellar panel whose work

and passion drive a strong identity that strengthens a commitment to equity and justice. Brock Weir, the moderator, is a seasoned journalist with the professional skills to conduct an engaging and stimulating discussion.”

Ms. Benn-Ireland agrees that Black history does indeed continue to evolve – even in ways that are sometimes unheralded.

“My proudest moment is being elected as the first Black trustee in the history of the York Region District School Board,” she says. “That is Black history. History is made every day. We celebrate Black History in February, but history is made by Blacks every day. Sometimes they’re not celebrated, sometimes it is not documented and, for me, that’s history.”

Being Black in Canada will take place at the Aurora Public Library on Thursday, February 20, from 7 – 8.30 p.m. Admission is free, but registration is encouraged to reserve a seat. To do so, visit aurorapl.ca or call 905-727-9494 x230.

New exhibition shows the power and importance of exploring creativity

From page 1

new art exhibition entitled “Say the Unsayable.”

On now through March 9 at the Aurora Public Library’s Colleen Abbott Gallery, Say the Unsayable is a collection of art produced and curated by participants in the CMHA’s Art Heals program and aims to not only dispel misconceptions surrounding art therapy but challenge the community on the benefits that come from encouraging the creative process.

“We have often found that art manages to say what is on other people’s minds when there are no words for [what they are thinking],” says Sharlene Wong, Occupational Therapist with the CMHA. “Many people identify with the image of being able to communicate some of the unsayable things further through their artwork.”

The resulting exhibition brings together pieces created by CMHA clients and staff alike. The work, says Ms. Wong, covers a variety of media. As she prepared to help hang the curated works on the gallery walls this past Monday, she said she was struck by very similar threads found in each of the works.

“What struck me was how people use the artwork to revert to memory,” she explains. “There are some works, for example, that talk about the past long ago and the different memories they have from growing up, and there is this visceral sense of what is going on and what that sense of memory was. There is a lot of feeling; a lot of the works evoke emotions and you can get a sense of what was felt in recalling the memory and thinking about the people who are there and what people are experiencing at any given moment in time.”

Ms. Wong says her passion is to “get everyone to see themselves as creators, as artists, able to communicate in a very

creative way.” This passion, she says, stems from recognizing the benefits creativity has on herself. Art can shift a “terrible” day to one of creativity and exploration, sometimes allowing the artist to find a degree of control amidst turmoil and chaos.

“It has taken me through some really difficult times and I was able to see the benefits [of art therapy] myself, and I can really see the benefits for other people too through things we have been doing at the CMHA. It really is awesome to see people have the opportunity to take a different role, from being a client or a patient, or user of services, to being someone who can create, making something they see as beautiful and that others see as beautiful, too.”

Art often plays “second fiddle” to subjects taught to children, she adds, but it is important to drive home the fact that art is integral to development.

“Even in my profession as an occupational therapist, often times the arts and crafts and things like that tend to be looked down on as airy-fairy stuff, things that don’t matter,” says Ms. Wong. “It ends up being something really meaningful and something that people can explore that takes them outside of just their weaknesses and disability and can kind of help people see themselves differently, be different, have an opportunity to give what they have to it. I think it helps people realize that they really do have something they can contribute to the world, whether it is their perspective, their views, how they see the world, how they communicate something.

“I really hope from this exhibition everyone gets a sense that creativity is for everyone. Being creative really does lend meaning to life and is a way to connect with other people. It is a way to be in touch with ourselves and I really hope that everyone feels inspired to create.”



Among the artists and participants on hand to install the new exhibition at the Aurora Public Library on Monday afternoon were Sharlene Wong, Fanny Andersen, Robert Little, Elizabeth Saville, L.A.R.K., James Watt, Beverley Beck, and Renee Rosenberg (volunteer holding the work of Melissa Bigall-Shier).

Auroran photo by Brock Weir

Saying the unsayable — one brushstroke at a time

By Brock Weir

When dealing with a struggle, sometimes its hard – if not impossible – to find the right words to express how you feel. It can leave you feeling isolated and even alone, but there are other outlets to convey your feelings, and sometimes that all-important first step is picking up a paintbrush.

This is the message being underscored by the Canadian Mental Health Association of York Region and South Simcoe as they launch their

Continued on page 12



Sharlene Wong, Occupational Therapist at the Canadian Mental Health Association York Region & South Simcoe displays work created by artist Melissa Bigall-Shier. The CMHA, in association with the Aurora Public Library, launches their new exhibition, “Say the Unsayable” this week, featuring the creative works of “Art with Heart” program members and CMHA staff.

Auroran photo by Brock Weir

Black History Month **The Heart of Africa:** Retracing our History

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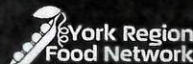
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Art Exhibition | The Heart of Africa: Retracing our History

January 29 to February 22, 2020

Newmarket Old Town Hall | 460 Botsford Street

Trinidad-born Author & Story-teller Rita Cox

February 1, 2020 | 2 to 3 p.m.

Aurora Public Library | 15145 Yonge Street, Aurora | Family Friendly

Black History Month Celebration Reception

February 8, 2020 | 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Newmarket Old Town Hall | 460 Botsford Street

Family Friendly | Must Register in Advance | Seating is Limited

RSVP: 905 953 5300 ext. 2844 | RSVP: sganji@newmarket.ca

Ujamaa Marketplace 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Newmarket Riverwalk Commons Evening Falls Illumination

Honouring Black History Month | February 13, 2020 | Dusk to 11 p.m.

Moderated Discussion: Being Black in Canada

February 20, 2020 | 7 to 8:30 p.m.

Aurora Public Library | 15145 Yonge Street, Aurora

Pre-registration required, visit aurorapl.ca or

call 905 727 9494 ext 230

Afro-Caribbean Cooking Workshop & Social

February 21, 2020 | 6:30 to 9 p.m.

Newmarket Recreation Youth Centre | 56 Charles Street

Register in Advance | Sponsored by the York Region Food Network

Register: 905 953 5300 ext. 2846 | Course Code: 125668

Author Zolika Reid-Benta 'Frying Plantain' Reading

February 27, 2020 | 6 to 8 p.m.

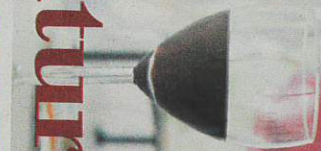
Newmarket Public Library | 438 Park Avenue | Family Friendly

For more information visit newmarket.ca/blackhistory



Arts

Culture



Being Black in Canada: Discussion should spur action, says panellist

By Brock Weir

It is important to have conversations, but it is so important to move beyond conversations to take action.

This is the view of Jacqueline Benn-John, Executive Director of the Women's Support Network of York Region. On Thursday, February 20, Ms. Benn-John will join musician Glenn Marais and former York Region District School Board trustee Tessa Benn-Ireland on

stage at the Aurora Public Library for In Conversation: Being Black in Canada.

Held in conjunction with Black History Month, Being Black in Canada will delve into contemporary challenges and celebrations experienced by Black people today – including race and economic mobility, systemic discrimination and the arts and culture scene.

“I wanted to participate in this panel because I thought it is very important to profile the contributions of Black people

in Canada, but also talk about some of the ongoing challenges and issues that Black people face today in Canada,” says Ms. Benn-John. “I really liked the fact there was an opportunity to create this awareness. Black History Month is often a time when people are talking about all the wonderful contributions of Black people in Canada and I think, in addition, there continues to be a number of challenges and I just loved the chance to be a part of the conversation.”

Ms. Benn-John has been working in the women's anti-violence sector for more than two decades and has a passion about addressing gender-based violence, equity and access for all women.

She first joined the Women's Support Network of York Region, York Region's only sexual violence crisis centre, in 2012, a stint which lasted until 2014. She returned to the organization as Executive Director this past fall.

“I was excited to be back with an organization that cares so deeply about gender-based violence and bringing an end to it, but also having the opportunity to really raise awareness about the issues of sexual violence in York Region and sex trafficking,” she says. “I thought it was a great opportunity to be a part of an organization that has actually been a leader in Ontario with the Safe Passages Program in addressing sex trafficking, but also to look at how to end these forms of violence against women. We continue providing counselling and support to victims who have been affected by these crimes, but I think it is equally important to raise awareness and try to bring an end and protect against these forms of violence.”

Education, she says, will go a long way in this regard, which is also why she says the February 20 panel is important to her.

“Often times you hear ‘Oh, slavery has ended,’ and with colonialism, they think these aren't issues we're still dealing with today, but I think they manifest in different forms,” she says. “These are issues that are still taking place...in our communities today. It is not another part of our world, we have these problems right here in York

Region.”

One only has to look as far as the Women's Support Network for examples of this. While Ms. Benn-John says that violence effects all women in all communities, with survivors of violence representing every background, gender and sexual orientation, access to justice can be another story.

Some groups have less access to not only justice, but community resources and support systems. English might not be their first language, which adds another layer of challenge – particularly with the healing process, she says.

There's a very low conviction rate when it comes to sexual assault, she adds, noting it is also the most under-reported crime. Survivors often don't want to be “re-victimized by engaging with the justice system” if there is inequality to contend with.

“I think an opportunity to have this type of conversation is very valuable,” she says. “This panel discussion is for the entire community, not just for Black people and I think it can be inspirational to hear the other panellists and to glean insights from their unique experiences, which can be valuable for teens and adults. From my social justice roots, I think it is important to move beyond conversations. When we think about how we can use our privilege to bring about changes, to be allies and supportive of others and their work, or what is taking place because, again, we can come out and hear a really interesting panel discussion but hopefully it can inspire folks to stay engaged in conversation and also in addressing some of the challenges that still persist in our community for Black people in Canada and others. The feature of this panel might be focused on Black history, but we know there are a number of challenges and barriers out there that other racialized and marginalized communities experience.”

Being Black in Canada will take place at the Aurora Public Library on Thursday, February 20, from 7 – 8.30 p.m. Admission is free, but registration is encouraged to reserve a seat. To do so, visit aurorapl.ca or call 905-727-9494 x230.

Blind Date with a Book will spice up your Valentine's Day reading

By Brock Weir

A great date can sometimes start with a great pickup line. But a bad one? That can be the cup of cold water that makes fast work of any sparks that might be smouldering.

If you're looking for a good pickup line this Valentine's Day, however, one that could spark a new and different kind of love, head over to the Aurora Public Library (APL) for a blind date.

APL's Blind Date with a Book program is back and organizers are confident it will be "love at first line."

On now through February 15, you can select a specially wrapped book from APL's teen and adult collections by only its first line. You're taking a chance, but you might discover an author, genre or story out of your normal comfort zone, but one that hits just the right spot.

"This is a fun way to spice up our readers' lives by offering the opportunity to check out a book by only its first line," says Reccia Mandelcorn, Manager of Community Collaboration for the Aurora Public

Library, who has spent the last month making interesting selections for the Blind Date program. "I compare those lines to a line somebody might drop you at a coffee shop or a pub. Do you continue the conversation, or do you stop it dead in its tracks? It all depends on how engaging that line is."

If you decide to continue the conversation, APL wants to hear all about your date. You're invited to log onto Facebook or Twitter, to comment, like, tag or share in order for your name to be entered into a draw for APL swag.

"Make your post public so we can vicariously enjoy your date – good or bad!" says Ms. Mandelcorn with a laugh. "Last year, some of our customers wrote in saying they discovered a genre or author they don't normally read and then went back to find more by the author. The whole thing about Blind Date with a Book is it is fun, kind of cheeky and a different way [for readers' feedback]."

"With Blind Date with a Book, we're giving people the opportunity to have a serendipitous read and to fall in love with someone unknown. We're not

matching them up at all. It is different and when people are surprised because maybe they only read romance and suddenly they find themselves loving psychological horror, which they never thought they did, or all of a sudden they find out that science fiction is something they really enjoy, then they have opened their eyes to a new experience and a new date."



BLIND DATE – Tired of getting the same old lines in the lead-up to Valentine's Day? Reccia Mandelcorn, Manager of Community Collaboration at the Aurora Public Library, has a few tried and true lines ready for the Blind Date with a Book program. For more, see Page 22.

Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

There's "trouble in Library Land", says reader

(Re: "Welcome to Library Land",
November 21, 2019)

This librarian correctly mentions that Canadian libraries are built on the fundamental right to free speech and that a reasonable limit to free speech and expression is hate speech.

As she notes, hate speech does not include "unpopular", "unconventional", or "unacceptable speech."

In a free and democratic society, it is essential that free speech is protected and that people be allowed to hear a plethora of ideas.

Unfortunately, labelling Meghan Murphy as a "radical" feminist and not explaining what Murphy said which was so offensive in her presentation at the Toronto Library, leaves readers uninformed.

The scientific fact that biological women have XX chromosomes and biological men have XY chromosomes should not be considered offensive speech.

The Y chromosome on average creates significant differences between men and women with respect to bone mass/density, muscle mass, lung capacity, size of heart and other organs.

Raising problems with competitive sports where biological women are at a disadvantage when competing against trans women for scholarships and trophies should not be shocking.

This is about fairness in competition.

Everyone should be tolerant of trans people and try to empathize on how difficult it can be for them in society. However, this position should not prevent discussion on issues arising when trans activists are pushing for changes in certain areas of our society.

There needs to be balance and fairness for everyone's rights in society.

Preventing this discussion is what fascists do.

There definitely is 'trouble in Library Land' when our librarians think that biological facts are the same as "apartheid, segregation and anti-Semitism."

Biological facts between the sexes are not populist and right-wing leanings as Reccia Manelcorn maintains, but are actually mainstream science.

Shelley Wister
Aurora

(Editor's Note: In the interests of fairness, following the receipt of this letter, The Auroran invited a member of the Trans community to respond to the points raised above. Accepting the invitation was Max Denley, Director of The Get Real Movement, an organization founded in Toronto in 2011 to combat 2SLGBTQ+ discrimination and promote acceptance in schools, summer camps and workplaces. Their response is featured below, continuing on Page 5)

Misinformation fuels stigma, says advocate

Let me start by saying I am appreciative of the opportunity to respond to the piece printed alongside this one.

Discussion is how we learn, and while I do not claim to represent the entirety of the trans community, I believe my perspective is one that could be informative to readers.

For context, I am a white, 20-something year old trans man, who has participated in sports, activism, and academia.

What is the difference between “free speech” and “hate speech”? Where do we draw the line between what is okay to say in an open, publicly funded forum (such as the Toronto Public Library), and what should be shut down and

Continued on page 5

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

From page 4

not supported by those in positions of power and authority?

Obviously, this is a question that would likely take more than a short letter to discuss, to get into the intricacies of language and law, but I don't think it needs to be that complicated.

Statements that are untrue should not be supported and backed by knowledge-keeping organizations.

Statements that fuel false representation of any group of people should not be shared in a public setting.

Statements that support the further ostracizing, harm, and othering of a marginalized group should not be amplified by organizations claiming to support diversity and inclusion.

Is it that far off to compare transphobic rhetoric to the beginnings of other examples of mass discrimination?

No genocide begins with killing; these horrid events start more subtly, with the “othering” of a group of people.

When we allow ourselves to begin to believe that a group of people are different from ourselves, it is easier to see them as less than us.

When we see them as less than us, it is easier to justify harming them.

By the time we reach full-blown genocide, we no longer see these people as equal human beings, and it all begins with how we talk about one another. We must not underestimate the power of words and ideas, and the audiences we give them.

Recent studies in Ontario have found that LGBTQ2S Youth are at 14 times the risk of suicide than straight, cisgender youth (www.the519.org/education-training/lgbtq2s-youth-homelessness-in-canada/lgbtq2s-youth-suicide). Every time we allow a space for someone to misinform others on trans issues, we fuel the stigma, discrimination, rejection, violence, trauma, and prejudice that contributes to those statistics. I also feel the need to respond to the “science” mentioned in the other letter.

There is actually no real “science” behind their remarks. Biases without a basis in fact are just that, transphobia. If you are actually interested in the contributions biological sex make to someone's athletic ability, you can read the research that many large organizations (including the Olympics), base their policies on.

This research confirms that chromosomes actually do not make measurable differences to an athlete's performance, what can is hormones. So, there are scientifically supported policies put in place, structured around those facts, that keep competition fair for everyone. Just one more example of claiming false facts as an excuse to discriminate. I would argue that we need to be more than “tolerant” of trans people. I “tolerate” the mint in my toothpaste because it is a flavour I despise, but I need to clean my teeth. I need to care more about my fellow human beings than my toothpaste.

Giving trans people the rights and respect you have always benefited from does not take rights and respect from you. If you have the ability to say we “shouldn't change society,” it is probably because you are not currently at risk.

Right now, we need to make critical changes, so that transgender human beings stop dying at alarming rates.

It is time to care more about human life than one person's platform to spew harmful words.

**Max Denley
Toronto**

Being Black in Canada: Musician works with students to promote equity

By Brock Weir

Glenn Marais knows firsthand the struggle for equity.

The Newmarket-based Juno-nominated musician and educator has roots in South Africa, from which his parents came to Canada because of apartheid and, through his work, has tackled topics ranging from inequity in the world around us to bullying within the schools.

Next Thursday, February 20, Mr. Marais is set to bring his own unique experiences to the fore at Being Black in Canada, a panel discussion hosted by the Aurora Public Library to mark Black History Month.

"Racial equality and inclusivity are very important to me, and I think particularly now with the rise of right-wing conservatism and what is happening, I want to really feel how people are seeing what is going on and participate in a discussion that can hopefully help people to get a better sense of where we need to go as a country," says Mr. Marais on why he accepted the invitation to join the panel.

Joining him on stage will be Tessa Benn-Ireland, the York Region District School Board's first African-Canadian trustee and Jacqueline Benn-John, Executive Director of the Women's Support Network of York Region.

Through his work in the schools Mr. Marais teaches "mindfulness and kindness", particularly in areas surrounding mental health. He facilitates workshops in the schools, bringing in different artists to create a conference-style day featuring yoga, martial arts, hip-hop dancing, and more.

Mr. Marais' work as a community

advocate began with the Stephen Lewis Foundation, where he dedicated his time to fundraising and building awareness for people living with HIV/AIDS in Africa. From there, he said, he made a conscious decision to work with marginalized youth in inner-city Toronto as well as with Indigenous persons.

"I wanted to help the two groups I felt were neglected the most, but it was an evolution of that beginning to find my way into it," he says. "The more I do it, the more I want to do. It is very fulfilling on a personal level, but there is such a growing need in all of the sectors – poverty, social stigma, mental stigma – and issues of equity too. I hate the thought of people living in a situation where they don't have the same access to things we do and they have to suffer for it. As far as Indigenous rights and youth go, I have come to know them very personally and it is such a huge wrong how they are treated. I can't stomach it anymore. It really pushes me to do more. I also have two girls, so when it comes to gender equity and inclusivity for women, they are a big motivation for me to get more involved in that aspect."

During Black History Month, Mr. Marais is often in the schools making presentations on that subject – yet the term "Black History Month" is not a term he is particularly comfortable with as "identifying a racial demographic by colour is so detrimental and we seem stuck in it."

"For some reason Black and White people continue to call themselves 'Black' and 'White' and I think we're so past that in our capacity of learning [to continue] in this narrow-minded approach," he says. "I think it dishonours people's heritage too. The fact that I am still

up here talking about this means we have a lot to do!"

To hear more from Mr. Marais and to learn more from his perspective, come out to the Aurora

Public Library on Thursday, February 20 at 7 p.m. for the panel discussion "Being Black in Canada." Admission is free, but registration is encouraged to reserve a seat. To do so, visit aurorapl.ca or call 905-727-9494 x230.



COMMUNITY DIALOGUE – Musician Glenn Marais has spent years going into local classrooms teaching students about equity and inclusivity. Next Thursday, February 20, he joins a panel of York Region leaders for Being Black in Canada, a community discussion hosted by the Aurora Public Library to mark Black History Month. For more, see Page 11.

Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger