

## County of Dufferin to commemorate Black History Month



Written By MARNI WALSH

The greatness of Canada and Dufferin County is a testament to the significant contributions and achievements of Black Canadians both past and present. These brave individuals faced many uncomfortable truths while striving for excellence and greatness not just for a group of individuals but for the greater good of society. By recognizing Black History Month in Dufferin County we pay tribute and honour the countless individuals who stood up to advocate for change, persevered in the face of challenges to help shed light to our history and right the wrongs of our past and change the narrative. Black History Month Proclamation - Alethia O'Hara-Stephenson

Dufferin Warden, Darren White says he was honoured to make the declaration of Black History Month at County Council last week.

Alethia O'Hara-Stephenson of Shelburne, Social Worker Geer Harvey and Centre Dufferin District High School (CDDHS) students Janine Beckford, Ashana Smith and Soha Soloman attended council to accept the proclamation.

County Council unanimously supported the declaration, says Warden White. We look forward to a number of events planned by community members for February.

Alethia O'Hara-Stephenson says the Warden's proclamation is significant as it is the first time we are formally recognizing the contributions of Black Canadians in Dufferin County. On January 9th, the students presented Council with the contributions and achievements of Black Canadians throughout the history of the County.

Events like Black History Month promote understanding and acceptance of other cultures, and without that knowledge, we, as humans, won't achieve true equity, says Warden White. As the demographics of our county, our province and our country continue to change, it important to know your neighbour.

As members of the CDDHS Social Equity Committee and Town of Shelburne Youth Advisory Committee, Soha Soliman, Ashana Smith, Janine Beckford say they were honoured with such a wonderful opportunity to present at Dufferin County Council.

This proclamation shows our passion for change to develop our community as well as establish a culture of diversity, the students told the Free Press.

Ms. O'Hara Stephenson says the proclamation at the County level was something that she pondered for some time. Inspired by the leadership of students at CDDHS early last year, she researched Black Canadians who settled in Dufferin County as well as notable

current leaders in Dufferin County? such as Phil Dewar from Soulyve Catering, Deputy Mayor Steve Anderson, Geer Harvey, Andrew Charles James and Juli-Anne James of Streams Hub, Nevin Anderson, Alton Stephenson, and future leaders in the students of Center Dufferin ?who kicked off the first Black History event at their High School.?

Once the proclamation was written, a delegation request was submitted to Dufferin County Council and Shelburne Town Council, and Ms. O'Hara Stephenson invited the students to participate. ?They were excited by the opportunity to present, she says. ?They recognized the impact their voice would have.?

?The proclamation is a celebration of diversity, a celebration of our Dufferin County, collectively and united, a testament to what makes our community great by recognizing our diversity,? she says. ?There is strength and power when we recognize and celebrate our diversity. This is what builds a strong community and country.?

Ms. O'Hara Stephenson expresses thanks to County Council and to the teachers at CDDHS, who were instrumental in helping get the students ready to present.

?A special thanks to the students, Ashana, Janine and Soha.? she added, ?for stepping up and demonstrating what true leadership is by delivering a powerful presentation and standing up for what they believe in,? Alethia said.

A flag raising ceremony will take place at Dufferin County office in February, with the date and time yet to be confirmed. The Pan-African Flag, a symbol of pride and unity for the Black Community and the many individuals who stand as allies, will also be raised.

The students who attended the proclamation told the Free Press, ?We are thankful to Dufferin County Council for recognizing our efforts and promoting the voices of youth and empowering Black experiences.This is change. This was needed. This is history.?