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Dufferin County Canadian Black Association hosting sixth annual Black History Month Celebrations

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LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

To recognize, honour, and celebrate Black history in Canada, the Town of Shelburne, in partnership with the Dufferin County Black Association (DCCBA), is hosting its annual Black History Month Celebrations.

The 6th Annual Black History Month Celebration will be held at Grace Tipling Hall from 6 to 8 p.m. on Saturday, Feb 21. The event will build on the Government of Canada's theme this year: ?30 Years of Black History Month: Honouring Black Brilliance Across Generations - From Nation Builders to Tomorrow's Visionaries.?

To start off Black History Month, an art display was launched at the Shelburne Town Hall Art Gallery on Feb. 1. Alethia O'Hara-Stephenson, founder of the DCCBA, said the exhibit covers multiple core elements of Black History in Canada.

?The art exhibit is featuring a combination of different artifacts,? she said. ?First, we've created a display for the No. 2 Construction Battalion depicting their journey. They were the first black Canadian battalion that participated in World War I. After previously being rejected, they were finally allowed to fight, but they weren't given guns and ammunition. Instead, they were given shovels and axes.?

?Thus, the term construction battalion. They went overseas, and they served honourably. However, when they returned, they were not received with honour and glory like the rest of the soldiers,? O'Hara-Stephenson added.

The No. 2 Construction Battalion, despite an eagerness to serve, faced discrimination at home from white men refusing to serve with black men, and the British high command (was) being wary of black soldiers potentially turning their training against them in the wider British Empire and its colonies.

There is also a display for the civil side of history.

?We also have a poster of the Honourable Jean Augustine, who was one of the, or the first black female in Parliament, and she was significant in having the motion read in Parliament to have Black History Month declared. And this year, of course, is the 30th year that Canada is celebrating Black History Month. So (we're sharing) bits and pieces of information that chronicles Canada's rich black history.?

Following the gallery displays, the main event will be held on Feb. 21, featuring a lively program of performances and a community gathering.

Master T will be the keynote speaker for the event.

?Master T is important because he is essentially a trailblazer in the entertainment industry in Canada,? Stephenson said. ?He's a pioneer. When we're thinking about legacy and breaking barriers, and you know, continuing on that journey, he was the perfect person to keynote this event celebrating the diversity and the richness of Canadian history.?

Attendees can expect African drumming and dancing, with some background and cultural context.

There will be musical performances by local artist Richard C, well known in Shelburne, along with Dianne James. In addition, youth from the Shelburne-based Revelation Worship Center choir will perform.

The celebration will also feature finger foods from Soulyve Catering, encouraging people to stay, mingle, and continue conversations in a relaxed, community-centred setting.

Stephenson said that the DCCBA is grateful for both the Town of Shelburne's continued support and the support it receives from local businesses, which help make celebrations like this one successful.

?The Town of Shelburne is very generous for giving us Grace Tippling Hall for us to be able to do our events, it really demonstrates their belief in community and supporting diverse organizations and groups,? she said. ?Majestic Kings and Queens Beauty Salon and Majestic Caribbean Grocery and Convenience, along with Topville Caribbean Cuisine, (are supporting us) as well. To see some of our local businesses stepping up as well is just amazing, and it speaks to the importance of these events from a community perspective.?

All together, the Black History Month celebration promises to bring a healthy balance of entertainment, education and advocacy, highlighting the historical significance that Black Canadians hold in the development of the country.

From fighting to serve on the frontlines to fighting in parliament, Black History Month reminds us that diversity is a strength, and never a weakness.