

**Black History Dinner Speech**

**Saturday, February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2017**

**[AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY]**

Good evening everyone. It's my pleasure to be here tonight representing the Office of Mayor and Sault Ste. Marie City Council. As always, it is great to be joined by our good friend and Member of Parliament, Terry Sheehan.

I'd like to begin by thanking ACCANO and the organizers who have put together tonight's dinner. I was able to attend last year's event and I'm happy to have been invited back again this year. I'd also like to thank this evening's sponsors, entertainers, our keynote speaker, Dr. Olaogun, as well as the staff here at the Machine Shop who are hosting and serving us tonight.

So of course, it's February right now, and we're celebrating Black History Month and the contributions of Black Canadians across Canada and in our own community of Sault Ste. Marie. I know we have some awards being presented later this evening, but I want to take some time to highlight the contribution that is being made collectively by the members of ACCANO.

The work you are doing is important, and I'll take a few moments to explain why.

If you followed the news last week, you probably saw the story that the 2016 census is out and Sault Ste. Marie's population has dipped again. While this is certainly not welcome news, it hardly qualifies as surprising news. We have an aging population and a low birth rate. If our community's dynamics don't change, it's likely that we're going to see further declines in our population and our labour force.

One of those dynamics that needs to change is that we have to start attracting more newcomers to our community. Many of those newcomers will likely be immigrants or new Canadians. Many will be visible minorities. A Sault Ste. Marie that returns to a population of 80,000 people is going to look much different than the Sault Ste. Marie we have today. And it is not going to look like the Sault Ste. Marie of 1990 either.

But it's important to note: acknowledging that reality isn't going to be enough to bring it to pass.

I realize this is going to sound redundant, but if we want to be a place where people choose to live, we have to offer the sort of environment that will make people want to live here. And part of that is attitudinal—it means being a welcoming and inclusive place, where people of diverse backgrounds can picture themselves making their homes.

We know that there is work to do in this regard. I've heard from people during our community consultations who say that they have had a difficult time integrating into our community.

We know that there are people who subscribe to small-minded beliefs and attitudes. We know that there have been some unfortunate and hurtful incidents directed at religious and cultural minorities in our community, including recently.

Our City is hardly alone or exceptional in dealing with these problems. But the fact that such problems exist elsewhere doesn't mean we should tolerate or accept them happening here.

If we want to be a growing, prosperous City, we have to consciously strive to become a more diverse place and then embrace that diversity. That means taking the time to learn from each other and to celebrate with each other.

And it is here where I want to loop back to where I began, and I really want to applaud ACCANO for all that your group has done over the last several years to encourage that sort of communal learning and celebration. You've self-organized to promote and raise awareness of your cultural heritage and also to make positive contributions across the community.

Your efforts can be seen in the partnerships you have struck, in events like tonight's dinner, and in the mission and vision statements that guide your organization. But most of all, I think they are exemplified in your slogan – Bringing People Together.

So before I go, I do want to get a quick plug in for something. Because I know that so many of you are engaged and passionate, I encourage you to take a few minutes when you have the time and visit [Future SSM dot com](http://FutureSSM.com).

We have a number of videos and fact sheets that lay out the current state of the community—and you'll see that we are quite open about what our challenges and issues are. We're looking for feedback and ideas from the community about what they feel needs to happen for the City to have a brighter future. We'd certainly love to hear from you.

Thank you again for having me and affording me the chance to share these thoughts with you. Please enjoy the rest of the evening.