

**Black History Month Dinner**  
**February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2016 Speech @ 7:30 p.m.**

**[AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY]**

Good evening. Thank you very much for having my wife Kyleigh and I here tonight; it's a great honour and a privilege. I would like to thank the African Caribbean Canadian Association of Northern Ontario for organizing and hosting this evening's dinner as part of the Black History Month celebrations in Sault Ste. Marie.

In particular, I'd like to acknowledge Dave Mornix and Jane Omollo of ACCANO for reaching out to me. Several months back, Dave and Jane met with me in the Mayor's Office. Our discussion included what ACCANO was planning to do for Black History Month. The fruits of that conversation included my participating here tonight, and also developing a proclamation for Black History Month that we did a couple of weeks earlier before City Council.

It's my understanding that this was the first such proclamation to be done in Sault Ste. Marie for Black History Month. So it was a very gratifying experience for me to be the one sitting in the Mayor's chair to read it out.

At this point, I've come to terms with the impermanence of being the Mayor. But when you are the Mayor—if you are lucky—you'll get to be a party to some special “firsts” and some unique events.

I've been fortunate enough to have a couple such events arise during my tenure, and I expect they will be among the memories I remember most fondly in the future. And being in the chair for that first proclamation will certainly be one of those memories.

So, Black History Month is a time to reflect on the many contributions of black Canadians to this country of ours. And similarly, at our local level, we can reflect on and celebrate how Saultites of African and Caribbean descent are making an impact and contributing to the vibrancy and diversity of our own community.

To my eye, it very much appears that this contribution is growing. It can be traced through the growth of ACCANO itself, from eight founding members a few years ago to more than seventy-five today. It can be seen in how prominent figures like Dr. David Nanang, Greg Mapp and Jane Omollo are making a difference through their professional roles.

The wonderful thing though, is that whatever our respective roles or responsibilities may be, we all have the capability to make a difference. When we take the time to share of ourselves and celebrate each other, we are making a difference.

I think I will close tonight on a bit of a personal note: as some of you have perhaps already deduced, Kyleigh and I are going to become parents in the very near future.

While we are both are excited, it's obviously going to be a big life change for us. And when you are faced with these sorts of changes in your own life, it's perhaps natural to reflect on how the wider world is changing.

It seems very evident to me that the world that my daughter comes to know will be a lot different than the one I knew as a child. And the Sault Ste. Marie that she grows up in and experiences will be much different than the one that I experienced.

Change is seldom uniformly good or bad. And there are some things about the world that my child is coming into that give me pause or make me apprehensive. Things that in some cases were not much of a concern when I was a child.

However, one of the positive changes I know she will benefit from is this: the Canada she will come to experience will be a much more diverse, open, tolerant, and accepting place than it was when I was a young. And the Sault Ste. Marie she comes to know will likewise be more diverse, open and accepting.

There is still ground to cover, but we have made strides in these regards, as a country, as a society, and as a community. And we should rightfully feel a measure of pride about that, even as we acknowledge that there is more to be done.

Being the Mayor has taught me the need for patience—more so than I would naturally be inclined to at times. From my perspective, it would be great if progress could happen in large bounds, with the biggest gains coming all at once. Sometimes, that can be the case, but most often, it is not.

Most often, progress comes in much smaller increments, a step at a time. In many ways, it is the same step **every** time. What is important is having the resolve to keep taking it.

So on that note, I just want to commend once again the work that ACCANO is doing and the work that everyone here is doing to build our community up.

I hope that everyone enjoys the remainder of the evening's festivities. Kyleigh and I will have to be ducking out a little early. Our Mayor's Youth Advisory Council—chaired by a certain Shalom Omollo—is hosting a youth art gala at the Civic Centre tonight, so we will be venturing over there shortly.

Thank you again for having us, and allowing me the chance to share these thoughts with you.