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Film inspires hope for peace

BY CHRIS TRABER
 Staff Writer

You're invited to help Peace Tree Day take root in York Region June 1.

A new festival to celebrate peace and diversity, Peace Tree Day debuts in many of our communities this year after a successful launch last year in Vaughan and Toronto.

Inspired by *The Peace Tree*, an award-winning film by Toronto producer, director and teacher Mitra Sen, the special day is simple way to address the cultural complexities and religious tensions throughout the world, Ms Sen said.

The 48-minute film about two children, one Christian and the other Muslim, who share the dream of celebrating each other's festivals, Christmas and

Eid, has spawned a timely movement and message, Ms Sen said.

"I think it's great," she said. "As an educator, it's important to share each other's culture and faiths, especially in a time when much of the world is divided by religion. It's important to unite people of diverse cultures and faith. I stress faith, because that's what divides us."

Gormley resident Ranjit Kumar initiated the project in York Region after viewing the film last November at the Markham YMCA.

"I was really moved by its content," he said.

He wrote to regional chairperson Bill Fisch, who agreed to hold Peace Tree Day in York Region.

Other municipalities followed suit, including Vaughan, Stouffville, Georgina

and Markham.

Both of York's school boards and York Regional Police have endorsed the day.

A school, community group or individual family can take part.

All you need is a tree. You create a symbol from your culture or faith and decorate your tree with it.

Then you research and create a symbol from the culture or faith of a friend or neighbour.

She sites examples as being a Christian cross, the Taoist ying-yang, Hindu om, Islamic crescent moon and star and the Jewish Star of David.

The opportunities to learn, share and understand are as numerous as the symbols.

Peace Tree Day differs from most multicultural festivals, Ms Sen said.

"This celebration is rooted in everyone's faith and culture," she said.

"It's not just about food, dances and music. It helps create an understanding of everyone's traditions and highlights just how much our societies have to offer.

"It's a concept of fusion and I believe Canada can become a real leader for the world," Mr. Kumar concurs.

"The spirit of Peace Tree Day is to see how we can bond and blend the tapestries of our various communities so that we can live in peace and harmony together," he said. "Hopefully, the concept will resonate throughout all our communities and beyond."

York Region will also have the first Peace Tree garden in the world.

It will be launched at a ceremony June 1 in the York Regional Police Safety Village at Bruce's Mill Conservation Area near Warden Avenue and Stouffville Road.

Ms Sen's film will be screened at the event.

Other municipalities will be hosting special events on and near June 1.

For information on how you can participate, symbol stencils, a project kit and updates, visit www.peacetreeday.com

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