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Abas recognized for towering work making community more accessible



By Brock Weir

Matthew Abas didn't hesitate when he threw his arm onto the shoulder of Mayor Geoff Dawe. This must have been a very familiar scenario.

Towering over the Mayor and his educational assistant, Matthew, a student at St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School was honoured with the Champion Award to mark the 10th anniversary of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

?I have had the pleasure of assisting Dan in the community of St. Maximilian Kolbe as an educational assistant for the past three years and in those three years I have watched Matthew advocate for not only himself, but his peers within the school and community,? said Patricia Dignard. ?Matthew continually demonstrates leadership skills, compassion and commitment to include all individuals by breaking down barriers of accessibility through his own experiences.

?Matthew advocated for higher desks and chairs to accommodate his height, for WiFi to be in the portables allowing all peers on the laptop program [to have] the ability to work within the classroom and complete their assignments, and Matthew has advocated and lobbied the York Catholic District School Board and the Town of Aurora requesting accommodations be made for his height to enable him to complete his driving instruction in a vehicle that is of a larger height.

?A vehicle and driver were found and Matthew then again lobbied the Town for an exemption to the bylaws allowing the car and instructor the ability to come to Aurora to drive in the community.?

According to Ms. Dignard, Matthew's contributions extend well beyond the York Catholic District School Board. He teaches seniors within the Aurora community to stay connected with their loved ones by showing them how to use apps like Skype.

?Imagine how excited they are by being able to keep in contact with their family and friends,? said Ms. Dignard. ?Matthew is a person who continues to help and assist members with disabilities in the community. He is a very caring and compassionate young man and I cannot think of a more deserving person to receive this award.?

This was a view shared by Council as they applauded the young man.

?How proud you have made us here in Aurora, for your peers, to set an example so everyone is included,? said Councillor Sandra Humfryes. ?It is pure inclusivity. I am just so proud of you and it is something we need to celebrate more. Keep doing what you're doing; it just lightens up everyone's lives.?

His is also an example everyone can emulate, including local lawmakers, added Mayor Dawe.

?It is something that we as Council need to keep first and foremost as we look at some of the challenges we have in terms of financing some of those issues around AODA (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act) compliance.?

The Champions Award was instituted to mark the 10th anniversary of the Act and, in turn, the AODA was instituted to ?improve opportunities for persons with disabilities and to provide for their involvement in the identification, removal and prevention of barriers to full participation,? said Chris Catania, Accessibility Advisor for the Town of Aurora.

?This award recognizes outstanding individuals who have demonstrated leadership, passion and commitment in the promotion of accessibility awareness and inclusiveness in the community.?