

Character Community Foundation honours collaborators and innovators



By Brock Weir

It doesn't take much to break down barriers ? in fact, sometimes all it takes is to be a person of good character. Case in point: the 140 nominees from across York Region honoured Wednesday night by the Character Community Foundation, recognizing people who are making a difference in our community by ?living in character where they live, work and play.? The Character Community Foundation was established to shine a light on individuals in our community who demonstrate positive character attributes in their home, school, work and community. The boys and girls, men and women recognized earlier this week walk the walk and talk the talk, but often do so quietly.

Wednesday, however, was a night to make some noise and among those cheered were three Aurora residents. Jason Scott, founder of the York North Basketball Association, was recognized with the Character Community Collaboration Award for his commitment to youth sport.

?He models acceptance, inclusion, empowerment and commitment,? said emcee Rob Cannone, reading his citation. ?He has volunteered up to 20 hours a week for almost 20 years with YNBA supporting over 10,000 children across the Region. In addition to his work with the YNBA, Jason volunteers in a variety of capacities with local Town Councils and a variety of community programs.

?While coaching children of all skill levels, Jason focuses on encouraging youth to pursue their dreams both on and off the court. His supportive methods build trust and confidence as he treats every member of the club as a valuable individual.? Aurora's sporting world was also represented by Ron Weese who, along with Bob Bak of Vaughan, was one of two recipients of the Character Community Innovator Award, sponsored by Magna International.

?Ron works tirelessly to ensure that Aurora is represented in the area of sport and a testament to his perseverance can be found in the establishment of the Aurora Sport Hall of Fame,? said Cannone. ?In his role with Sport Aurora, Ron has worked tirelessly to develop and create the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame, which honours the legacy of inducted members from the community while celebrating sports history. Also with Ron's determination, Activate Aurora was officially launched in September 2016, with one goal ? to make Aurora the most Active Community across Canada.

?Ron has assembled a team of community stakeholders and, with their help, will reach our entire community, challenging them to become more active, while enjoying the benefits to their overall health. Putting together a team of community partners, organizations, and associations, they have already initiated a number of events, including the York Region Physical Literacy Summit.?

Behind the scenes ? and behind the badge ? Anthony Torresan of the York Regional Police was recognized with the first Character Community Colleague Award. He was recognized for his tireless work within the York Regional Police, as well as his optimism and perseverance which, they say, encourages ?even those set in their ways to try something new.?

?With the officers who are already motivated and full of out of the box ideas, Anthony provides fair and honest feedback to make sure their initiatives succeed,? said Cannone. ?He has the ability to keep staff motivated and convert every challenge into a teaching

moment, all the while sharing in their successes, yet taking responsibility when things fall short.

?Anthony was one of the driving forces behind the creation and development of the very successful York Regional Police United Hero, he generated excitement for the project and never wavered in recognizing its potentially positive impact. As a strong supporter of the Ontario Mobilization and Engagement model of community policing, Anthony strives to empower the community to become leaders in the fight against crime. Anthony is an ethical and esteemed officer who is respected by his fellow officers and supervisors as well as by the community as a whole.?

Recognizing the recipients and the nominees, as well as the late Don Cousens, former mayor of Markham, who had been instrumental in the success of the Character Community Foundation, York Region CAO Bruce McGregor said the people assembled that evening at the Richmond Hill Centre for the Performing Arts exemplified the best in the Region.

?Despite our differences, we're tied together by our shared commitment to living with character, good character,? he said. ?Good character speaks to everyone in all faiths and cultures. Good character is not something that just happens, it takes deliberate commitment and should be recognized. Tonight we celebrate the contributions of some of our leading citizens, school groups, colleagues and organizations who exhibit positive character attributes. Character is about how we deal with each other on a daily basis. It is how we conduct our business dealings, how we act at school and at home and, most significantly, how we behave when no one is looking. It is about respecting one another. Character is about being optimistic, having courage, and showing fairness, and living with integrity.?

Among the other Aurora nominees were Heather-Anne Lambert MacKay and Heather Hamilton, both of whom were nominated for the Citizen of Character (Adult) Award, Ms. McKay for her volunteer work with Doane House Hospice and Ms. Hamilton for her work with Special Olympics.

Nominated along with Mr. Scott for the Character Community Collaboration Award were Aurora Winter Blues Festival co-founder Jamie Macdonald, who was recognized for his work with the Youth in Music Program, and Brazilian Jiu Jitsu instructor Jonathan Stephan.

In the Character Community Colleague category, Catherine May of Lester B. Pearson Public School was nominated for her ?compassion, perseverance, empathy and fairness? working with students at the east Aurora school, while Garry and Sarah Glidden were recognized for their efforts with the Neighbourhood Network Holiday Gift Drive.

Finally, also nominated alongside Mr. Weese for the Character Community Innovator Award, was entrepreneur Chole Vargas, founder of the Spanish-language magazine Hola York Region.

For a full list of winners and nominees, visit www.charactercommunity.com.