

Supportive students recognized for making school a better place



By Brock Weir

Shyiem McGillvary knows firsthand the importance of making a friend.

The Grade 12 student at St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School goes out of his way each day lending a hand where it is needed, recognizing there are people in his school community who need a bit of support from time to time.

McGillvary, as part of the school's wrap-up of Black History Month commemorations, was recently recognized by the St. Max community for his leadership with their Black History Month Support Award.

The Support Award is presented each year to a student who is a true reflection of the concept put forward by Accessibility and Special Needs advocate Jean Vanier that, "All humans are sacred, no matter what their culture, race, religion, capacities or incapacities, or weaknesses or strengths may be. Each of us needs help to become all that we might be."

The recipient noted for their ability to hear the call of those in need and to provide care and support, and also for acknowledging their own need for support on occasion.

Shyiem had no idea he was receiving the award when he walked into the school's Black History Month closing assembly, but might have sensed the energy building in the room as the citation was read out, with much of the first two rows of the assembly filled with family and friends just waiting for the right moment to cheer.

"This year's recipient recognizes the importance of caring for self and others," said the school of Shyiem. "He demonstrates a positive attitude and a strong work ethic and is willing to help others who need support. He is a responsible and caring individual who understands that everyone needs support from time to time."

And cheer they did along with his fellow students.

"It means a lot," he told The Auroran. "I had no idea that was going to happen. I heard I was nominated but I didn't actually know I was going to win. It's an honour and I am very proud. I support people with special needs, and I also help out my brother around school and I am hoping he will do good next year when I am not here."

Currently weighing his post-secondary options, he hopes to pursue a path in the dramatic arts at either Centennial College or George Brown College.

"Get involved and don't be afraid to be yourself," he said when asked what advice he would give to the student leaders who emerge after his graduation. "Everyone has a place in this school no matter what."

He was one of three students honoured at the assembly, along with Sage Rampersad and Shelby Clifford.

Sage was recognized with the Inclusion Award, which is handed out each year to a student who sees others as unique and worthy individuals and who refuses to define others by labels or stereotypes. Each recipient demonstrates inclusivity by actively reaching out to others in a welcoming spirit of friendship and appreciation.

“The recipient of the inclusion award is a kind and welcoming individual who is always willing to assist their classmates and fellow students,” said the school. “Through classroom interactions and participation in various school activities, this individual demonstrates a genuine sense of openness and takes an inclusive approach to all of their endeavours.”

Shelby was honoured with the Justice Award, which goes to a student who shows a commitment to the concepts of equality and justice. The recipient acts in a “just” manner in how they treat others, and also reflects on and seeks meaning in the concept of equity. The recipient chooses to seek solutions to problems which cause injustice and examines ways to create an environment in which all can achieve their potential. This commitment to justice is demonstrated through inquiry, analysis, involvement and action.”

Said the school of Shelby: “The recipient of the Justice Award is an individual who has made their mission in life to ensure that everyone they meet is given the same respect and dignity; each person feels heard, seen and appreciated. In return, this student only asks that you continue this attitude in your own life.”

Shelby said the recognition will propel her forward as she heads off to Nova Scotia this fall to study business and commerce at Dalhousie University.

“I think it will fuel me forward in the sense I can understand through this what I am doing is right,” she said. “I know that when I wake up in the morning and talk to people and I ask them how they are and include them, it makes me want to include people in the future.”