

Give Back Award winners offered 8,000 hours to community



By Brock Weir

Students who dedicated their high school careers to giving back to their communities were honoured by Magna and Neighbourhood Network for their contributions last week.

On Thursday, to mark National Volunteer Week, 20 students from across York Region were joined at Magna's Aurora headquarters with their families for the celebration, at which students received a scholarship to pursue their post-secondary education.

Careers in the sciences was a common theme for many of the Aurora-based Give Back honourees, including Williams students Rachel Gallagher and Nicole In.

“This is recognition that even the smallest things we do for our community makes a difference, has an impact and doesn't go unnoticed,” said Rachel, who is eyeing an undergraduate in biological or life sciences “I really took that to heart because it means no matter what you're doing, you're doing something, and that is a start.”

Rachel's citation pays tribute to the priority she set for herself to volunteer both within her school and wider community, taking a lead on in-school fundraising initiatives ranging from Newmarket's Coldest Night of the Year to Lemons for Leukemia, which challenges students to raise funds by seeing who can swallow the greatest number of lemon slices to benefit the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society.

Among these, Rachel says Light the Night, a walk for Leukemia research, was the most meaningful of her high school career, leading the Williams team this past October.

“We raised over \$3,000,” she said. “Raising that amount of money and being able to give back to the community and help fund research was really amazing. Attending the event that

night was so emotional and so impactful. We walked back to SickKids and some patients smiled and waved down at us. You could just directly see your impact on others. Even though a few thousand dollars isn't a lot in the long run ? you need millions in research dollars ? it is just amazing to be a part of.?

Nicole, who plans to pursue a degree in life sciences with a focus on mental health, was recognized for her ability to ?find joy and purpose in helping others.?

?She believes that volunteering holds the potential of changing the local community and the world in a positive way,? reads her citation, which underscored her work for the Canadian Cancer Society, the Best Buddies Club, Williams' Peer Mentor group and her involvement in the school's Me to We club.

?This award means a lot,? said Nicole. ?I feel it shows that anything you do really has an impact and you're actually impacting the lives of others in a positive way. This propels me to continue on.?

Asked which volunteer experiences she has found most rewarding, she cites a fundraiser she spearheaded with her sister last year: a restaurant fundraiser at Kelsey's Aurora to benefit Blue Door Shelters.

?It is really important that we look out for other community members who are in need and just support them,? she said