

St. Max marks 10th anniversary with celebration of everyday heroes



By Brock Weir

Heroes are all around us.

Some may have already achieved greatness through selfless acts and personal determination. Others are heroes just waiting to come into bloom ? with proper care and nurturing.

This was a prevailing theme last week as Aurora's St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School celebrated its tenth anniversary last Friday.

Held in conjunction with Catholic Education Week, St. Max celebrated its milestone with a star-studded day of celebration and reflection, beginning with a traditional Catholic mass, a pep rally and rugby game.

The ceremonies concluded with a special surprise performance from Glass Tiger, which was something of a homecoming the band's founding guitarist Alan Connelly, who has served as an Educational Assistant at St. Max for the better part of ten years.

Fred Fox, brother of hero and icon Terry Fox, served as the keynote speaker at the morning mass.

Mr. Fox was on hand to congratulate St. Max students for surpassing their goal of raising \$10,000 in last year's Terry Fox Run -- \$1,000 for each year St. Max has served the community ? and for the \$62,000 St. Max has raised for the Terry Fox Foundation since they first took on the challenge.

?Schools like St. Max are continuing Terry's dream,? Mr. Fox told students. ?Terry showed us that one person can make a difference.

Individually, any one of you can make a difference in whatever you want to do in the future. Terry believed that anything is possible if you try. Today, over \$750 million has been raised in Terry's name, from that \$1 million he thought maybe he could raise across Canada [in his Marathon of Hope], it's schools like St. Max that have truly made a difference in the lives of so many people. A cancer diagnosis today is so much better than it was 10, 20, 40 years ago when Terry was first diagnosed.?

Terry, he said, "never thought of himself as a hero" and when people used that term referring to him during his Marathon of Hope, he was decidedly uncomfortable with that moniker. He wasn't running to become rich and famous, have monuments dedicated to him across the country, or to become a Canadian icon; rather, said his brother, he was simply trying to make a difference in the lives of others.

The theme of the everyday hero was one also touched upon by Father Frank McDevitt of Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church, who led Friday's service.

Father Frank shared the story of St. Maximilian Kolbe, the Polish priest interred by the Nazis at Auschwitz, who volunteered to die in the place of a stranger.

"We Christians are great believers in heroes," said Father Frank. "In our Christian tradition, we recognize and celebrate how people have lived and how they have died as a profound statement of who they are and who they can be. St. Max is no exception. His death at a concentration camp reflects his call to be a good shepherd. If there was one thing that personified evil as it is understood in the last century, perhaps concentration camps may stand as the symbol of that evil. The Good Shepherd is one who does not run away in the face of evil. St. Max did not run away, but the heroic death runs the risk of causing us not to recognize the life that went before. A good life is the natural conduit to a good death.

"If there is any gift the school can give you beyond the knowledge that is imparted, beyond the skills of problem solving, beyond the confidence in your own intuition that the school can give you is the ability to stretch yourself, to reach out, to reach way out, to be a shepherd [who] stands for the truth in the face of evil. Whatever the valleys that most define your life and relations with the world and God, at the end of it is you that will shepherd these values throughout life.?"

The founding values of St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School were underscored during the evening program which featured live music from the school's impressive programs of choirs and bands, food prepared by students studying hospitality, the presence of local dignitaries including Newmarket-Aurora MP Kyle Peterson, Mayor Tom Mrakas, and Trustee Elizabeth Crowe, along with former principals Dominic Scuglia and Melton Moyo who each received rock star welcomes.

?You can have the most beautiful building with all the wonderful programs, but the thing that will make the building special will be the people,? said Mr. Scuglia. ?I can honestly say in my time back, after three years having left the school, nothing has changed in this school. Kudos to Melton Moyo and to Peter (current principal Peter Parente) who have carried on the wonderful tradition of this school in inclusion, to making sure that every student matters.?

Added Mr. Moyo: ?The one essential component I found was everyone strives to cultivate a safe, nurturing environment for reflection and growth by sacrificing for the other in their own special way. Wherever your life journey takes you, never forget the compass or essence displayed by our faith champion, St. Maximilian Kolbe.?