

Business Excellence Awards honour difference-makers



Whether they employ ten or one hundred, are just starting out or have been long-standing members of the community, think local or think global, the best of Aurora's businesses were recognized last week at the Aurora Chamber of Commerce's Business Excellence Awards.

Recognizing businesses in the commercial in non-profit sectors, businesses and individuals that place great emphasis on their community involvement, and even give a hand-up to young entrepreneurs looking for opportunities, the event represented a cross-section of the community, shining a spotlight on individual and team achievements.

"Tonight's event is a celebration recognizing the successes of the local businesses and organizations in this room tonight. It is also about learning about them from their exemplary performance and ensuring that the spirit of enterprise and community continues to evolve and thrive here in Aurora," said Mayor Tom Mrakas at the start of the evening. Economies and societies are not static; they rely on progress and are driven and shaped by ideas and contributions of individuals just like yourselves.

"Our Town currently has over 2,200 businesses and many of those are homegrown success stories which are not only vital to the success of our community, they are also inspiring up and coming entrepreneurs to launch their own businesses. The Town of Aurora is committed to creating the conditions in which many more entrepreneurial dreams can be realized so that they too can enjoy the success that we are celebrating here tonight. When you succeed, we all succeed. We honour your hard work, innovation and achievements, and we also celebrate your journey."

The evening began with special recognition, an award not listed in the program: The Aurora Chamber of Commerce Youth Engagement Award, presented by Sandra Ferri, Executive Director of the Chamber, to realtor Lenard

Lind of the Lind Realty Team.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AWARD ? Lenard Lind

?We all acknowledge how important it is to immerse our youth in the business community at an early age so they can build their confidence and ability to engage and network with business leaders,? said Ms. Ferri, before announcing the winner. ?Over the last year and a half, this individual has supported the Chamber's efforts to engage the high schools and their students in Chamber activities and events. This individual is and has always been a big supporter of Aurora's youth. In fact, we have students and teachers attending tonight and they have been sponsored by this individual.?

After Ms. Ferri announced the winner, Mr. Lind stepped up to receive the award.

?I don't have much of an awards speech here or anything, but I think we all have to give back to the community, and giving back to the community is helping the youth get involved in the business community,? said Mr. Lind, encouraging other businesses to get involved in supporting youth as well.

NEW BUSINESS VENTURE ? Tie: Addison Marketing Solutions / Maple Teahouse & Bakeshop

In a first for the Aurora Chamber of Commerce's Business Achievement Awards, a tie was reached in the category of New Business Venture. Honours were shared with Addison Marketing Solutions, a local ad agency specializing in online sales, as well as Maple Teahouse & Bake Shop, located at the northwest corner of Bayview and Wellington, which is owned and operated by new Canadians ? both local success stories!

Additional Nominee: Air Riderz Adventure Park

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AWARD ? Key Advantage Team

The Community Involvement Award recognizes a business or employee which/who shows a strong commitment to give back through participation in numerous business and community organizations and/or charitable events.

This year's winner was the Key Advantage Team, a realty company led by Susie Strom and Caroline Baile.

?I just want to thank the Chamber for this award and I want to acknowledge our fellow nominees because I know how much they do for our community,? said Ms. Strom. ?One of the things that happened when Caroline and I merged our teams, I can just say it was seamless and amazing because I share this award with an amazing group of women who work really hard for their clients and they understand the importance and the value of giving back to the communities they live in. We're so honoured. I want to acknowledge Caroline

too, because she is on trek right now with 120 Royal LePage agents who are doing a 100km trek across the Sahara. Collectively, they have raised over \$1 million for women's shelters across Canada.

Additional nominees: Wellington Aurora Dental, The Lind Realty Team

NON-PROFIT OF THE YEAR: The Aurora Cultural Centre

Embarking on its tenth anniversary season, the Aurora Cultural Centre was honoured with the Non-Profit of the Year Award.

"This is an incredible honour for us," said Suzanne Haines, Executive Director of the Aurora Cultural Centre. "We have an incredible group of dedicated volunteers who have been involved with us since we started, on the board, who take you to your seat when you come and see a show with us. Also, a very dedicated staff team who you saw on stage here, most who have been with us since our doors opened. An incredible group who just really believe in the passion and what arts can do for our community. I am so blessed to be working with this team of volunteers and staff. Thank you to everyone who has made the last 10 years incredible, including our founding Executive Director Laura Schembri who set up a foundation of business excellence with the board initially and allowed us to really stand on this platform today."

Additional Nominees: Yellow Brick House, St. John's Ambulance

INNOVATORS AWARD: Mission

Mission, a digital media company which bills itself as a "values-driven creative organization, focused on delivering amazing fundraising results" while shining a light on important social issues took home the Innovators Award.

"I want to take this opportunity to congratulate all the nominees and thank you to whoever nominated us," said company president Michelle Carter. "This is a great honour. I would also like to thank the Aurora Chamber of Commerce. If you're wondering what we do, we basically work in the digital space for the not for profit sector, but we focus on moving pictures. A couple of years ago, as everyone was starting to move online and the internet changed our world, we saw a real gap in the philanthropic sector in terms of using video content in the digital space. We're super honoured to use our powers for good and we're super-honoured to have this award."

Additional Nominees: Rap Riderz Innovation Centre, STEM Minds

YOUNG ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR ? A2Y Dance Inc.

A family-run dance studio founded by Aly and Yossi Niznik,

A2Y offers kids a variety of dance lessons aimed at the improving the whole self, whether it is their fitness and health or imparting valuable creative and leadership skills, they offer a full slate of recreational and competitive dance programs.

Additional nominees: Kustom Contracting Inc., Braceland
Student Painting

SMALL BUSINESS OF THE YEAR: The Millionaire's Daughter

The local consignment shop The Millionaire's Daughter took home top honours in the Small Business category.

"We were just so happy to be nominated, and I am so proud of our staff," said Maureen Barnes. "I have been doing this for almost 11 years now with three other locations and you never get up here without the people behind you. Of course, thank you to the Chamber for nominating us, but honestly I am so happy for everybody's hard work."

Additional Nominees: Wood Brothers Drywall, Glow Medi Spa

LARGE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR ? CleanRiver Recycling Solutions

Taking plastics out of the waste system and transforming them into a variety of products designed to make recycling easier, CleanRiver Recycling Solutions took home the evening's final honour, recognized as Large Business of the Year.

"It is an absolute honour and privilege," said company founder Bruce Buchan. "What does it take to be an entrepreneur for 30 years? Anyone in this room who is an entrepreneur, I am sure they can have all kinds of stories and there's no shortage, but I want to boil it down to three points. The first is integrity; integrity is the foundation. Then there's the team: teamwork is what drives growth, but, most importantly, it is the culture within our organization because culture is the glue that binds and prevents the wheels from falling off."

"I would like to propose a toast to everyone else here. This is for all the entrepreneurs in the area tonight. The reality is you're all winners here because you're the risk takers and the visionaries that are really the backbone of our economy."

By Brock Weir