

Community Recognition Awards honour Aurora's brightest ambassadors?



By Brock Weir

In the words of Mayor Geoff Dawe, they are "the mortar that really binds our community together", and on Monday night, over 90 outstanding community volunteers and organizations were honoured for their contributions to Aurora at the Town's annual Community Recognition Awards.

Whether they had contributed as volunteers for five years, 10 years, 15 years, and over 20 years of service to community groups as varied as the Aurora Horticultural Society, Seniors Association, Food Pantry, Minor Baseball, Scout troops and other sporting organizations, they were hailed by Mayor Dawe for the "positive contributions" they have offered Aurora as a whole.

"The glowing comments and the stories we received for each of our recipients here is nothing short of inspirational and it is certainly a privilege and a pleasure to acknowledge your immeasurable commitments to our community," said Mayor Dawe. "I would like to thank you all for being here, and for the many spirited years of service you have provided to our community. You are certainly our best ambassadors."

Individual achievements were recognized in several categories, including the Youth Volunteer Award, which honours youngsters who have given their time for the greater good.

Sama Sobhani, for instance, was awarded for his work with the Junior Youth Empowerment Program, which empowers young teens to take part in social action. He has been involved with the program for nearly four years, dedicating his time to mentoring others to improve the world around them.

12-year-old Lily Edmunds was also recognized for her multifaceted contributions. A track star with an Olympic goal, she has used her passion for running to raise money for those in need, raising more than \$1,000 for the Alzheimer Society of York Region in memory of her grandmother. She now serves as the youngest-ever member of the organization.

"This means a lot to me because I never really thought I would be recognized for my achievements, so this really makes me happy," says Lily. "I just wanted to do stuff for charity and it really made me feel proud. It is just the feeling you get when you're doing it and, once you're done, the smiles you get."



Nancy Black with Mayor Dawe

Civic Appreciation Awards, designated to individuals or groups who have received provincial, national and international recognition, were handed out to Reg Chappel for his decades as a coach of a variety of local swim teams, including the Aurora Swim Club and Aurora Master Ducks. 12-year-old harpist Sebastian Gobbels was also heralded for his world-class talent, a distinction recognized by the Royal Conservatory of Music.

Charles Sequeira, long-time president of the Aurora Seniors' Association and advocate for seniors' issues was singled out for the Individual Outstanding Achievement Award, while the group/non-profit honour was picked up by Sport Aurora, which now has 28 local sports clubs under their umbrella.

The Good Neighbour Award, instituted to thank those who continually demonstrate generosity, kindness and consideration towards their neighbours, was given to Jim Normone, a resident of Aurora since 1984, who is always willing to lend a hand when his neighbours need it the most.

The Community Organization of the Year Award was given to the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame, while Nancy Black, a driving force within the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame received the Bob Harman Memorial Award, which recognizes those who have made a distinct contribution to the field of recreation over at least 15 years.

Ms. Black was honoured for her more than 20 years volunteer work as founder of the Masters Swimming Club, the Master Ducks, and her work establishing the Aurora chapter of Special Olympics Ontario.

"I would like to say this more than validates the work I have done because [but] I don't see this as an individual award," she says. "You don't do things alone. I was up there individually, but it is all of those people who have been involved in those efforts that helped me do what I was doing."

Inspired by her mother, an active volunteer, with student clubs and the CNIB, Ms. Black says although she didn't set out to honour her mother, it taught her the right thing to do.

"It was my founding drive to do things because they should be done."