

Community Recognition Awards honour the 'backbone' of Aurora



By Brock Weir

Volunteers are the backbone of every community and on Monday night over 20 individuals who work tirelessly behind the scenes to make Aurora 'neighbourhoods, business community, schools' what is today were recognized.

Leaders in business, youth, environmentalism and simply leading the way as good neighbours were honoured for their service at the annual Community Recognition Awards held at Town Hall.

Recognized with the Youth Volunteer Award, which is presented to young Aurorans who have demonstrated positive leadership, was Michelle Stewart, a Grade 12 student at Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School.

'Michelle has been a part of the Sarah's Stars club for more than three years,' reads her citation. 'The club began when Michelle was inspired by a local girl named Sarah who, in 2012, was diagnosed with cancer at the age of five. Students have since raised more than \$10,000 for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society of Canada. As Michelle moved forward through high school, she continued supporting Sarah's Stars. In her final year of school, she became chairperson of the club, leading dozens of students to support the fight against cancer. Michelle is a caring and kind leader who has inspired youth around her.'

Next up was the Green Award, designed to recognize those who support protection, preservation, sustainability and the conservation of our natural environment. This year's recipient is Windfall Ecology Centre, which was hailed for its efforts with the Healthy Kids Community Challenge, storm water mitigation programs, and helping businesses and residents address climate change.

Aurora Winter Blues Festival co-founder Jamie MacDonald honoured with this year's Arts & Culture Award. Originally inspired by the Johnson Family, it is designed to recognize individuals and groups who have enhanced the Aurora community through their support of the arts.

'Jamie has been a driving force behind the Aurora Winter Blues Festival, having grown this amazing community experience from a house party into a month-long event. Jamie has been instrumental in creating cultural collaborations and networking throughout our Town. From music pop-ups at art exhibitions and local businesses, to summer outdoor band shell performances at the Farmers' Market, there are few residents that have not benefited from his volunteer efforts.'

Individuals and non-profits who have enhanced the Town through their contribution, commitment, and leadership in charitable giving, civic engagement and community spirit are recognized with the Community Leadership Award. This year's recipient, participants of The ABLE Network, certainly fit the bill.

'Participants of the ABLE network programs are involved, on some level, in volunteer work on a weekly basis that benefits the Aurora community. The ABLE Network is a not-for-profit community-based program that provides relevant and inclusive work and recreation opportunities for young adults with intellectual disabilities. Participants lead the way in creating a community where everyone has the opportunity to make meaningful contributions.'

Some participants have found opportunities at Omar's Shoes and co-owner Raz Khamissa was recognized with the Inclusivity Award.

'He firmly believes that helping eliminate barriers for people will make Aurora a better place to live.'

Good neighbours all, but one local couple was singled out with the Good Neighbour Award. Alda and Reggie Lima were recognized

for giving of themselves ?effortlessly? to help their neighbours.

?From assisting others with projects such as putting out neighbours' recycling, mowing their lawns and helping to fix fences, they do not hesitate to bring their tools and get involved. Not only are they handy, but they are generous with their homemade Portuguese treats, which they willingly share to brighten anyone's mood. The Limas contribute to making Aurora a great place to life.?

A great place to live is also a safe place to live, and this year's recipient of the Community Safety Award is Richard Boyne, who was recognized for his work with the Youth Justice Committee, Aurora Police & Community Together (PACT), the Community Safety Village and the York Regional Police Auxiliary Unit.

?Richard has demonstrated outstanding leadership, long-tome volunteering commitment and continuous efforts to raise awareness about safety.?

While a great place to live is also a safe place to live, it is also fostered by the contributions of good business, and the recipient of this year's Good Business Award is Magna International which was recognized for the millions of dollars raised for local charities over the decades through Hoedown and giving back in numerous other ways.

Recipients of the 2017 Volunteer Service Awards are (20 Years) Mary Haberer, Janet Metcalf, Janice O'Hara, Penny Stephens, (25 Years) Helen Burlanyette, Suzanne Charlebois-Bin, Brigitta Emes, Diane Schormans, Michael Varcoe, (30 Years) Ken Smith, Rosemary Verge, (35 Years) Jan Gibson, Bruce Walkinshaw, (40 Years) Marion Lougheed and Deborah Simerson.