

Give Back Students ?tap into the well of human compassion?



By Brock Weir

Kids in York Region have plenty of opportunities to get outside and have fun.

Parks abound, forests are not too far away, and, here in Aurora, lakes are just a short drive in any direction. But this is but a dream for many underprivileged youngsters in Toronto, and Robert Lee has dedicated his young life to making a difference.

Lee, a Grade 12 student at Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School was among the nine Aurora residents ? among 20 York Region residents overall ? who received a 2018 Give Back Award from Magna International and Neighbourhood Network.

Established by Belinda Stronach as a way to provide scholarships to students not based on academic merit, but rather how much they contribute to the community around them, the awards program has grown and expanded along with Neighbourhood Network into Aurora, King, Newmarket, East Gwillimbury, and Georgina.

Robert's work with Urban Promise, and a number of other community organizations, takes him to many of these areas, as well as to Whitchurch-Stouffville where he is dedicated to York Regional Police's Community Safety Village.

?It is part of my personality that I really enjoy giving back and just helping out others, especially those who can't necessarily help themselves,? he says. ?I have worked with Urban Promise now for three years. We help run summer camps with Toronto Community Housing. It is giving back to people who don't have as much; helping the kids, helping them run around, helping them burn off steam.?

Last month, the 20 Give Back Award recipients, along with their families, were welcomed to Magna International's headquarters by philanthropist Joan Kelley Walker.

Ms. Walker told the teens she was left inspired by the thousands of volunteer hours the students, as a whole, have invested in their community.

?The power in volunteerism has the potential to make incredible changes in our society and it has a ripple effect,? she said. ?You guys are doing this now, but it is also a message to future generations and it is a responsibility we have.?

Ms. Walker asked the students to consider why they volunteer. In her case, she said it boiled down to the view of volunteerism as ?human compassion at its absolute finest.?

?Some people write a cheque, some people are in the trenches doing a lot of hard work, some people do planning and strategy, the business of it; whatever gift you have, whatever gift you share, big or small, it all comes down to the same well in your heart of compassion,? she said.

Last week, The Auroran highlighted the citations of Aurora recipients Maya Bertola (Sacred Heart Catholic High School), Tristan Hicks (St. Andrew's College), Rachel In (Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School), Josie Kearney (Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School), and Madisyn Lamoure (St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic Secondary School).

We conclude this week with Robert Lee (Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School), Amy Robidoux (ESC Renaissance), Alex Saeedi (Cardinal Carter Catholic High School) and Lauren Wilson (Aurora High School).

ROBERT LEE

To Robert, giving back means taking the abilities you excel at and, in turn, using those gifts to help others. Robert sits on the Student

and Arts Council at his high school. He is an active member of the Best Buddies program, working with his peers who have intellectual and developmental disabilities, as well as the Youth Alive program, running fundraisers for local charities. Outside of school, Robert volunteers for the York Regional Police, Yellow Brick House, the Terry Fox Run, Neighbourhood Watch, the Canadian Cancer Society, Urban Promise, and the Community Safety Village, just to name a few.

AMY ROBIDOUX

In Amy's words, "There is no better feeling than giving back and being able to see the faces and expressions of those you have helped." Amy is an avid volunteer. She is a youth soccer coach for the Aurora Youth Soccer Club, where she helps young girls learn the sport. Amy participates in the annual Curl for Cancer and Relay for Life fundraisers for the Canadian Cancer Society. She has been a member of her school's Student Pastoral Council and was a Grade 7 camp leader. Recently, Amy travelled to El Salvador to build a home for a family in need with Habitat for Humanity.

ALEX SAEEDI

In Alex's words, "Although this might sound cliché, volunteering has changed my life forever." As a volunteer, Alex has found his passions and made life-long friends, while also making the community a better place. In his role as volunteer coordinator for the Canadian Cancer Society, Alex promoted volunteerism for the organization's peers, collected donations and is currently leading a group of students to plan and execute this year's Relay for Life event. Alex volunteers in the cardiology and emergency departments at Southlake Regional Health Centre. He is the director of volunteer affairs for the Youth Nation Alliance and has also given back at We Day, Canadian Blood Services and as a math tutor.

LAUREN WILSON

To Lauren, giving back means making someone smile and helping to make someone's day better. Lauren has been an active volunteer within her high school. She has represented her peers by annually serving as an executive member of the Student Council. Lauren leads her classmates as president of the Drama Council. She is a York Region District School Board mentor, and she works with local elementary schools to help them develop their own theatre productions. Outside of Aurora High, Lauren gives back by volunteering for Highview and Holland Landing public schools, the Canadian Cancer Society, and the Aurora Public Library's Reading Buddy program.