

## Junior Citizen nominee helps spread the love of science while paying it forward



**By Brock Weir**

Jacqueline Li is a life-long lover of learning and, for the Aurora student, there are opportunities to learn around just about every corner.

Li, a Grade 12 student at Thornhill's St. Robert Catholic High School, is an active volunteer throughout the Greater Toronto Area, spreading her love of giving back to the communities around her wherever she can and however she can and these efforts were recently recognized by the Ontario Community Newspapers Association.

An Ontario Junior Citizen Awards nominee, Li was recognized for her multifaceted contribution to both her school community and the community at large through a variety of volunteer and leadership initiatives, all the while maintaining an excellent academic standing in her school's International Baccalaureate Program.

She not only volunteers her time at organizations as varied as the Ontario Science Centre and local retirement residences, but gives of her time as Student Council President where she helps spearhead initiatives and fundraisers benefiting groups such as the Canadian Cancer Society, Prostate Cancer Canada and ShareLife.

As an extension to her leadership initiatives, Jacqueline planned the 'Pay it Forward' event [to raise awareness of homelessness] with the York Secondary Catholic Presidents Council where she collaborated with each of the York Catholic District School Board's student leaders to bring the initiative back to their school, shared teacher Derek Chan. From toothbrushes to soap to socks, Jacqueline liaised with all the schools to ensure that a minimum of 2,000 of each respective item would be donated from the schools to assemble a minimum 2,000 care packages. She also brought the initiative to our school where she urged students to donate beyond the minimum 2,000 pairs of socks by dedicating a spring spirit week where herself and student council hosted a series of events in the cafeteria, such as The Great Sock Hunt, sock toss, sock matching, sock juggling and even sock trivia.

These activities spread awareness of homelessness in the community to our school as more staff and students participated in these activities during their lunches and started to bring in more socks. With Jacqueline's leadership and encouragement for the school to go above and beyond, St. Robert CHS donated over 3,500 pairs of socks to the initiative. Alongside her school-wide efforts, she shared her ideas and collaborated with other student leaders to encourage students across the School Board to donate items. At the end, herself and the Presidents Council had assembled over 4,000 care packages at the Ontario Catholic Student Leadership Conference, achieving beyond their goal but, most importantly, achieving the greater goal of helping people living in homeless shelters in Toronto.

The Ontario Junior Citizens Awards is an initiative of the Ontario Community Newspapers Association to recognize future leaders who are making conscious efforts to see change in society and are working hard to make a difference both locally and globally. Jacqueline's efforts bring about the change she wants is evident, and it is also balanced with a remarkable academic average above 95 per cent. So, the natural question is, just where does Li find the time?

Sometimes we do have spare time here and there and when you manage your time you can actually fit a lot into your day, Jacqueline tells The Auroran. I usually do most of my volunteering right at school so, in between that time, I think my most

optimum time of the day is around 3 ? 4 p.m. and that is when I do most of my volunteering. When you really like something, you're willing to put in the time for that. It doesn't feel like you have to do the time management; it almost seems like a hobby.?

Right now, Jacqueline is focusing her passion on science and technology in the hopes that she can pursue a career in computer sciences and business, bringing together all the components of STEM (science, technology, engineering and math).

?Volunteering gives me a chance to meet new people all the time and when I get to learn the stories of other people, where they are coming from and how their experience made them who they are, it inspires me to give back. Meeting new people, understanding how kind they are, and how they have given back to the community inspires me to do so as well.

?At the Science Centre, I got to work with a bunch of children and they were the ones who inspired me the most. They are at such a young age and they see the world differently than a lot of older people, even myself who is not that old! I taught them some lessons and they found everything fascinating. At the end, they said a lot of the projects we did made them want to become future engineers or doctors and that is what pushes me to keep giving back to the community.?