

Leading Women and Girls form ?backbone? of community



By Brock Weir

As pianist Rachel Reimer sat down at the keys and sang a heartfelt rendition of "All You Need is Love" at this month's Leading Women/Leading Girls Building Communities awards ceremony on International Women's Day it was, as emcee Vivian Risi pointed out, a very appropriate selection.

There was indeed a lot of love in the room as Newmarket-Aurora MPP Chris Ballard recognized outstanding women who have made a difference not only in Aurora and Newmarket, but in the much wider world.

Not only is Shaylyn Benaissa a Leading Girl, she also helps build the resources to train four-legged leaders for those in need as a volunteer with the Lions Foundation of Canada Purina Walk for Guide Dogs.

"Shaylyn is a girl that demonstrates exceptional community leadership and helps to improve the lives of others," read her citation.

"Shaylyn has participated in the Ride to Conquer Cancer and has spent time fundraising for girls and women who are suffering from concussions. She is an inspiration to her peers and her community."

A Leading Woman helping foster the Leading Girls of tomorrow is teacher Nadia Gaurino, who was honoured for showing her students how to be the change they want to see in the world.

"Nadia is a teacher who not only speaks to her students about the need to support your community and the world around you, but she shows them through her actions. Nadia has helped organizations like the Lions Club with donations for their annual Christmas Baskets, and has worked hard to encourage students to participate in their food and toy drive. Nadia also spends her summers volunteering at an orphanage in Costa Rica. Last year, she raised enough money to purchase them a trampoline along with basic necessities. Nadia displays high levels of leadership and is a fabulous role model."

Educators were also represented by Lisa Walters, Vice Principal at Aurora Montessori School at the top of Industrial Parkway North.

"Lisa demonstrates to the students and staff what it means to truly care for those around you. Lisa inspires the students to be positive and support the people in your community. Lisa encourages the students to write stories that emulate virtues such as kindness, respect and trust. Her colleagues look to her for guidance and know that she truly has everyone's best interests at heart. She continues to inspire the faculty to get involved and make the world a better place."

Getting involved in the lives of students not only happens in the classroom, but also in the wider school community, as Catherine Capek can attest.

"Catherine is a person who gives her time with great passion and care for others. Catherine is a valuable and integral part of her children's school and out in the community. She has organized pancake breakfasts, organizes the fall fair for the children, and is an advocate for young girls. She continues to raise awareness for local causes such as the Food Bank and the Annual Book Drive for the Children's Book Bank. She is an inspiration to the children and the faculty."

Maimoona Ashraf might still be a youth, but this Leading Girl has a maturity which allows her to share her story with her peers.

"Maimoona impresses all who meet her with her ambition, intelligence and moving personal story. Maimoona has overcome significant hardships in life and she now speaks about her experiences and shares her story in the hopes of educating, supporting and

inspiring community members to make lasting changes. She is a champion for other young women who experience family and cultural violence. Maimoona is living proof of the strength of the human spirit.?

Tanin Monzavi, on the other hand, uses her energy to inspire young women to share their challenges ?and live life with integrity.?
?Tanin's efforts to improve the lives of women and girls in her community start with her ability to educate those at a young age about the importance of equality between men and women. Her strengths as a leader comes from her sincere desire to learn from others and strive for excellence. Tanin actively promotes issues such as equality, diversity, preventing violence against women, and eliminating racism and discrimination.?

Helping tackle these issues on the frontlines are members of the York Regional Police, three of whom were honoured as Leading Women this month.

Officer Robyn Kassam was heralded for using her position to ?inspire and educate young women.?

?Robyn's participation in the Run for IT high school program has promoted overall health and wellbeing among the young ladies who attend. Robyn has become a mentor for many of the participants. She inspires the girls to strive to the best of their abilities and encourages and supports them in all their endeavours.?

Rebecca Boyd was also celebrated for her dedication in providing young girls with the tools to ?help them become strong, smart and bold.?

?Rebecca currently chairs the Internal Support Network ? Women in Leadership group. Rebecca is a huge advocate for breaking down barriers and promoting participation of girls and women in public service. Rebecca is a true champion for girls and encourages them to strive for success.?

In addition to her regular service with the York Regional Police, Karian Guimond has taken on the role as a mentor ?who truly cares about the young girls and women in her community.?

?As an officer, she is engaged in the mental health support unit and supports young women experiencing mental health issues.

Karian also designed a girls group with Girls Inc. and social workers to assist at-risk girls in high school. Karian's mentoring of other women shows how our efforts can improve the lives of others.?

Empowerment is the watchword for Edna Bozhori, an area student whose leadership within her school was noticed by nominators.

?While maintaining her honour roll status in all grades, Edna is the president and founding member of the school's Health Occupation Studies chapter. She is also co-president of the school's WE committee. This group of students is involved in a wide number of activities that help empower students to bring positive changes in our community and across the world.?

Taylor Piotrowski has followed a similar path, focusing on projects close to home in serving as president of the Aurora LEOs Club, the youth chapter of the Lions Club.

?Taylor was the force behind the fundraising campaign with her fellow LEOs to donate money to Rose of Sharon. Together with her peers, they were able to donate \$400. Taylor has volunteered her time at the Aurora Street Festival and even though she has had to leave the organization for school, she continues to show what giving back means.?

As does Marsha Fox, who has dedicated herself to several local organizations that address the issues of homelessness and nutrition.

?Every week you can find Marsha helping to serve breakfast with the York Region Food Network. She also volunteers with the St. John Chrysostom Church community bread program and Inn from the Cold. Marsha mentors many of the guests at Inn From the Cold, especially older women and volunteers on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve, making sure everything is set up for those in need.?

Mentorship has also been key to Gloria Rezler's efforts to make our community a better place. Recognized for her work in mentoring young women to get involved, she was celebrated as a ?tireless community worker and advocate.

?Gloria was a founding member of STORM (Save the Oak Ridges Moraine) and is an advocate for environmental issues everywhere. Gloria has served her community well and is an outstanding role model for girls and women of all ages.?