

Local students get a taste of the workforce through Canada Summer Jobs program



By Brock Weir

Matthew Hunter came into the deal knowing how to pour a simple cup of coffee.

But every cup of joe the Aurora resident sold at the Newmarket Farmers' Market this summer was one pour that went towards the extraordinary.

Mr. Hunter, who graduated from King City Secondary School this year, spent his summer vacation working for Commons Coffee, an independent coffee roaster focused on training adults with autism and developmental challenges with skills, confidence and independence.

Mr. Hunter came to Commons Coffee founder Susan Popper through the Canada Summer Jobs program, a Federal grant program that provides funding for tens of thousands of job opportunities for young Canadians from coast to coast.

"I wanted him to experience dealing with the public," says Ms. Popper, noting that Matthew's time at Commons Coffee, along with the placement of a Queen's University student who was brought on as a job coach, allowed her to step back a little bit from some of the Commons Coffee operations and focus on further development.

Recently, Newmarket-Aurora MP Kyle Peterson welcomed many of the program's local participants to an end-of-summer lunch celebrating the work of the Canada Summer Jobs Program. Held at CUPE 905's Newmarket headquarters, it was a way for the riding's Federal representative to meet with those most impacted and benefited by the program.

"I am proud that this year in Newmarket-Aurora we were able to secure 277 jobs and over \$800,000 in funding in Newmarket-Aurora alone," he told participants. "I don't have to tell you why this program is so important, but the concept behind it is the age-old problem that youth have trouble finding a job because employers are looking for experience but you can't get experience without having a job. That's the dilemma and the problem this program tries to solve. I think it does a great job.

"I think the employers would agree that the employees out there are second to none, especially in Newmarket-Aurora, of course. I think it is a great experience for the students too and I hope you all agree. It is a great program that helps some of the priorities of our government, which is growing the middle class, making sure everyone has a fair opportunity at success here in Canada, and that is really what this country is all about. This is a way to bridge the gap between opportunity and success."

Also in the room were representatives from the Aurora Historical Society, the Aurora Museum & Archives, Sport Aurora, and many other community groups that were able to provide student job opportunities through the program.

"Sasha, our student, was a big help to Sport Aurora," said Sport Aurora's Laurie Mueller. "He was my right hand. I split my job into two and it was a great help. I hope he learned a lot, I hope he was exposed to a lot of people and that is what the program is about. It's about giving the students the opportunity to meet people, to give them some exposure, and give them an opportunity. I am hoping that is what Sport Aurora did for our student and I am absolutely going to be applying next year.

"I thank our MP for providing us with the opportunity, and we're very lucky. Just because we work in Aurora, I am hoping he leaves with a sense that Aurora is a very unique community and we are very community focused. I hope that what we have been able to provide gives him a sense of how to tap into community relations and partnerships. If anything, I hope he takes away just how special and unique Aurora is."