

Multimillion dollar expansion fosters student creativity



By Brock Weir

Creativity and collaboration are key skills in a twenty-first century world but, when you get down to it, they have been essentials since the dawn of time. It's all in how you foster it.

Richmond Hill's Holy Trinity School took fostering creativity and collaboration to the next level on Friday morning, formally dedicating their exponential expansion of their learning facility, complete with innovative spaces for design, fabrication, music and the arts.

It's the result of their \$22.9 million multi-phase 'Shaped by Experience' capital campaign, which focused on building a student environment with 'cutting-edge' innovations to promote science, technology, engineering, art and math (STEAM) over 17,095 square feet.

'The vision was truly to put Holy Trinity School (HTS) on the forefront and the leading edge of education,' said head of school Helen Pereira-Raso. 'It is centred on student learning and how we develop our teachers to continue to foster creativity, collaboration and all those skills that are so essential in our world. We often call them twenty-first century skills, but they have been essential forever. The reality is there is a new intentionality on how to focus on them and how we develop young people, to create spaces that first and foremost inspire them to be creative, to allow them to push boundaries, that allow them to use technology in ways to create and not just consume, to allow them to be critical thinkers. We want to have spaces that inspire them.'

'Not only that, we have a huge commitment in our school to develop young people of character and we have never lost that focus. Although academic excellence is so central to us and part of our mission and foundation, so is developing people who are great citizens, who are ethical, have a moral compass, and are good humans who are going to do good unto our community and their world, wherever they choose to be at any given time.'

The early morning ribbon cutting was attended by Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MP Leona Alleslev, Richmond Hill Mayor Dave Barrow and a host of other dignitaries. While the formal ceremonies took place in a brand-new, fully-equipped music room, students on the other side of the building were hard at work in a design lab working on the creation of prosthetic limbs and other innovations.

The Shaped by Experience campaign is the most ambitious fundraising initiative in the school's 35 year existence. What started out as a place of learning in the basement of a Thornhill church has grown and developed exponentially.

In addition to the two new music rooms and the design labs, Phase One of the Shared Experience expansion includes new art studios and an innovation incubator.

'Shared Experience is comprised of five themes: student learning, incredible people, amazing spaces for learning, sustainability, relationships and reputation. Underpinning this strategy is the recognition of how we learn is constantly evolving and that innovation and technology are key enablers of positive change in education,' said Rob Whitman, Chair of HTS' Board of Governors. 'Our school is fortunate to have educators who strive to be at the forefront of professional development, students who are challenging us to embrace new ways of personalized learning, such as virtual and augmented reality, generous benefactors and governors, both past and present, who encouraged the critical thinking required to take us to the next level of education.'

'Now, almost three years into our plan, we're here this morning to celebrate the creation of Phase One of Amazing Spaces for

Learning. Based on the wonderful spaces that we have today, and what Phase 2 of what Amazing Spaces will envision, just imagine what the next 35 years will look like.?

From the perspective of Ms. Pereira-Raso, the expansion means nothing at the end of the day if students are not inspired by them or can't do many of the incredible things with them they couldn't dream of before.?

They are pushing boundaries in such innovative ways that demands these spaces, she said. It is not the other way around. We don't have new spaces because we wanted them; our students and our teachers and this learning environment demands that they are built so they can fulfill their greatest potential.

Our students are so innovative, our teachers are pushing boundaries every day, challenging traditional teaching in order to be able to elevate our students through the use of technology. What that has caused us is to really look at our spaces and ask, are they allowing them to do the things they need to do? That is truly at the heart of this vision.?