

Portraits of Giving recipients receive hometown welcome



By Brock Weir

Anyone can write a cheque, but giving your time and talent is something else again ? and it can make a lasting impact.

That is one of the driving forces in the life of Rosalyn Gonsalves, the inaugural recipient of Portraits of Giving's ?Lifetime Giver? award.

Portraits of Giving, the brainchild of Richmond Hill photographer Karen Merk, was created as a way of honouring York Region residents who give back to their respective communities. Now in its tenth year, Portraits of Giving's Class of 2019 includes Ms. Gonsalves, and fellow Aurora honouree Benny Socia, former owner of the Aurora Tigers.

Both local residents were honoured last month as the Portraits of Giving tour arrived at Town Hall's Skylight Gallery ? and this week is your last chance to see Ms. Merk's portraits and learn more about this year's dozen honourees before the tour moves on to Georgina.

?Since our opening reception at the Sheraton Parkway Hotel in April, we are continuing our role of inspiring and celebrating corporate responsibility in York Region through the stories, portraits and videos of over 100 York Region leaders as of this year,? said Ms. Merk at a special celebration honouring Ms. Gonsalves and Mr. Socia. ?Thanks to our guests who attended our April 11 opening celebration, we have raised \$5,500 for Canadian Feed the Children, who educate and help Aboriginal children and other children around the world. We are very thankful for all of our partners who have helped us grow over the years to become a unique

initiative about giving back that also gives back and highlights the many benefits like employee engagement, building stronger communities, and simply feeling good while we give back.

?I truly believe if we can, we should give back.?

This is a philosophy shared by Ms. Gonsalves.

Ms. Gonsalves was nominated by the Aurora Chamber of Commerce, where, from 1985 ? 2006, she served as General Manager.

It was a time of significant development for the Chamber and during her tenure she helped spearhead a number of firsts including the Aurora Home Show in 1987 and the Aurora Street Festival, both of which remain popular to this day.

When she first joined the Chamber, they could only offer \$4 an hour, but that didn't matter to her. They only had \$3,000 in the bank back then, no permanent home, but at the end of her term as General Manager, their finances were more secure ? and they had built a new permanent home with zero debt thanks to some canny fundraising.

The Aurora Chamber of Commerce, however, was not Ms. Gonsalves' first foray into being a local difference-maker.

Little more than a year after she, her husband George, and their two children settled into their new hometown, people across Aurora soon learned her name as she went door to door collecting signatures for a highly successful petition to eliminate long-distance charges on calls made from Aurora to Toronto

The resulting petition of 5,000 signatures was presented in the House of Commons by then-MP Sinclair Stevens and, from there, it made its way through the CRTC to become a reality.

Ms. Gonsalves has also dedicated her time to supporting parent councils where her children attended school, has served on various councils at Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church, the Friends of the Aurora Public Library, the Economic Development Advisory Committee for the Town of Aurora, and currently volunteers a number of hours each month with the PROBUS Club of Aurora, the Newmarket Voice Festival, and the Optimist Club of Aurora.

?I am honoured and humbled to have achieved the Lifetime Achievement Award from Portraits of Giving,? Ms. Gonsalves told well-wishers, including Mayor Tom Mrakas, at the

recent reception. ?I would especially like to thank Sandra Ferri, Executive Director of the Aurora Chamber of Commerce, and Sandra Watson for submitting my nomination. Volunteering builds a sense of community and belonging. It also helps to develop your creativity and open-mindedness to new ideas of affecting change. Governments do not provide sufficient funding to fulfil the essential services necessary to meet the needs of the underprivileged in our society. Anyone can write a cheque, but giving of one's time and talents, lending an ear, or simply just being there, can make a lasting difference in people's lives.

?You embody what a true Auroran is,? remarked Mayor Mrakas, before presenting a token of congratulations to Ms. Gonsalves. ?This award is about giving. You're selfless, you're helpful, you're loving and a dear friend, and I am honoured to be able to present you with this certificate.?

The Skylight Gallery stop on the Portraits of Giving Tour wraps this Friday, July 12. It returns to Aurora from September 16 ? October 1, where the work will be showcased at the York Regional Police headquarters on Don Hillock Drive.