Spotlight shines in glorious black and white

By Brock Weir

Captured in glorious black and white, some of the faces featured in this year's Portraits of Giving exhibition would rather hide their respective lights under a bushel.

They're not seeking recognition, fame, or a moment in the spotlight but, three Aurora volunteers, among several others throughout York Region, reluctantly stepped into the spotlight last week to be celebrated at the official launch of this year's exhibition at the Aurora Cultural Centre.

Featuring the photography of Oak Ridges' Karen Merk and the written word of Aurora's Cindy Shaver, this year's exhibition highlights people who have given back to their communities up and down York Region.

?Each person is different, but they share a common passion for helping others,? said Ms. Merk. ?There is another common theme I continue to hear each year and that is giving back is carried through to the next generation. Many of our portraits of giving recipients have this in common and they have commented that their parents made an impact on them and now want to instill the importance of giving back to their own children. It is incredible to see that cycle take effect.?

One such person in whom the cycle is clearly evident is Aurora's Brooke Harrison. As a family, the Harrisons have made giving back a way of life. Brooke is pictured in the arena of the Aurora Family Leisure Complex with some hockey gear in recognition of her work to collect hockey equipment for less fortunate and remote Aboriginal communities in Northern Ontario.

?Brooke was very impressive,? said Ms. Shaver. ?The things she has accomplished is more than most people have in a lifetime. What sort of stands out and is the running theme of the evening is that it is a family affair. She learned from her parents that this is what she should be doing and her brother gives back.

?She said, ?my family don't do sports. We're not an organized sports kind of family. What we do is give back.' That is just their focus and it is so refreshing and inspiring.?

Brooke was joined by her mother Gina, father Dale, and brother Jordan at the opening. It was also a family affair for Aurora's Jennifer Ettinger, who has dedicated herself to empowering women across York Region. Through her organization of local events to honour the Women's Centre of York Region, as well as her Fit Your Style that looks after women inside and out, her recognition this year left her ?tickled pink.?

?I wanted to reach out to my community to see what we could do to aid women on an empowerment basis, whether it is the

Women's Centre of York Region, the Girl Guides of Canada, young women, older women, to give them the tools to feel more confident or enable them to feel empowered? she said.

?As an entrepreneur, you have to take the responsibility of meeting your community and helping your community. That was my mentor's training that whether or not there was a need, it was a responsibility to seek out who you can help or who you can support.?

The spirit of giving back from both within and outside the business realm is a philosophy shared by Stewart MacLaren. Mr. MacLaren was noted for his work in both sectors, whether he was lending a hand to the business community through his work with the Aurora Chamber of Commerce, getting his hands dirty as a long-time booster of Theatre Aurora, or as one of the committee members planning Aurora's 150th birthday party.

He was a man of few words, however, when asked to speak about the honour.

?I never really thought of it as giving back to the community, I just thought of it as participating in the community,? he said. ?If you live in an area, you should become a part of it. I am lucky enough to work where I live, so this is more about being a part of the community, and not as much about giving back.

?You meet some fun people, you meet some interesting people, some really smart people, you meet some who are not so smart, but you meet some people who have got issues and you have to help them out. The people are half the fun.?