

AHS' Fowler named Teacher of the Year



By Brock Weir

Aurora High School teacher Teri Fowler marks her own successes on her students' own "musical moments."

These moments aren't limited to those that are necessarily imparted in the classroom, but simply making a connection with a particular piece or instrument, but whatever gets them out of themselves and one with the music.

"When we as an ensemble, or students as individuals have had that out of body experience with the musical performance they themselves achieved, that is really one of the highlights of my job," Ms. Fowler, head of Aurora High School's (AHS) music department tells *The Auroran*. "It is seeing the elation with the students of how well they did or how far they have come after a really successful performance."

These examples of "musical moments" outside of the school often come her way at this time of year when, as the school year wraps up, she asks her students to reflect on the last few months. Many of the responses that come in speak about out of school experiences, such as playing outside of the Schonbrunn Palace in Vienna where a rogue piece of sheet music is caught and held in place by a total stranger in the audience.

"I'm satisfied if, at the end of the year, they can appreciate [a musical experience] that was out of the norm, exciting memories that they can cherish."

This is a philosophy she has made an integral part of her teaching career, since her first days in 2000 with the music department at Richmond Hill High School. She moved to AHS a year later, where she has remained ever since.

It is as head of the school's music department Ms. Fowler was named last week as the York Region District School Board's Secondary School Teacher of the Year. With Terry Cariglia-Bull of Georgina's Morning Glory Public School, winning the elementary school honours, both women were honoured for "exemplifying the Board's mission, vision and values."

"Teri is a selfless advocate of the arts and has worked tirelessly at providing rich opportunities for students to be involved in music appreciation, performance, and creation," said the Board. "Teri is a consummate professional, who consistently exhibits optimism and kindness in all her interactions with students, staff and parents. Teri shares her expertise and knowledge with colleagues, offering many examples of how we can celebrate every students' success, demonstrate our commitment to their well-being, and inspire them to learn and grow."

Ms. Fowler was nominated for the honour by the administration of AHS. Principal Maria Maiato says Teri's humble attitude adds 'beauty' to the honour because she consistently downplays her own achievements. Of the board's values, Ms. Maiato says she exemplifies them to a high degree and they were happy to put her name forward.

'Not only is she an incredible educator, but the way of her rapport with students is very different and exceptional,' she says. 'She is always smiling, always positive, and it is all about the kids. She is here every morning, she stays late at night, she has kids of her own, but she is always there for our international trips and just goes above and beyond.'

Case in point: When both teachers were honoured by the Board with a reception, Ms. Fowler was unable to attend, leading the students on a trip to New York. Nevertheless, days after receiving the gong, she said she was still in shock that she would be chosen from all the teachers within the school for simply doing what she loves to do.

'I have held music close to my heart since I was young and I find there is nothing better than making music all day with the students who love it as much as I do,' she says.

She knew coming out of high school that teaching was something she wanted to do. Her mother was an English teacher and her father a computer studies teacher, and while it might be in the blood, when it came down to her choosing a path, she was torn between science and music. Her passion ultimately won the day.

Within her role, she not only teaches the Grade 11 and Grade 12 students, but also helps sow the musical seeds in incoming high school students. She tries to get elementary school students to come to AHS to get involved with the Senior Students to see what high school life has to offer, and the benefits one gets becoming involved with music classes and programs.

'It is really exciting because students are just in awe of the older students and they realise that music is a pretty fun place to be,' she says.

'Our motto in the department, especially to students who may leave, is 'May music never leave your life.' Keep it as close to your heart as much as you can for the rest of your life. Try to stay involved in some way. Music develops all sides of the brain, it develops the ability to work as a team.

'It shows an extremely strong character discipline that teaches the whole mind and the whole heart. That is important to pass onto the kids in today's day and age.'