

Aurora teacher to be honoured by Toronto independent school

A dedicated Aurora teacher will join the distinguished ranks of Gerald Emmett Cardinal Carter, Red Kelly and Frank Mahavolich this month as he's inducted by St. Michael's College School into the Order of St. Michael.

Joe Younder, a life-long educator and Aurora resident who became a beloved English teacher and debating coach at the independent school will be celebrated Wednesday, September 17, at the Liberty Grand Entertainment Complex, when he's inducted into the Order alongside lawyer Brian Bellmore, physicist Dr. Robert J. Birgeneau, and school benefactor Dominic Montemurro.

The Order of St. Michael was established by the school in 1996 to recognize those who exemplify the Basilian Fathers' motto, 'Teach Me Goodness, Discipline, and Knowledge' through their outstanding contribution to the spiritual, academic, or material welfare of the school and society.

Joe Younder is a lifelong award-winning educator who taught for 24 years at St. Michael's College School, as well as at Brebeuf and overseas in Ireland and Italy, said the school of Younder, a graduate of their 1956 class. At SMCS, he was a beloved English teacher, department head and debating coach. He remained highly active post-retirement through various Alumni Association roles, including as an ambassador with older alumni, and as a long-time editor of the school's alumni magazine.

Younder, a former member of Aurora's Public Library Board and the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame's Selection Committee, tells The Auroran he's extremely honoured to be inducted into the Order.

He says it's all about the relationships formed at the school and says some of the students he taught in his early days as an educator have become life-long friends.

When I graduated from university, I had to earn money to continue my education, he says. I took a year off and taught elementary school where I earned some money. My intentions were to go to the Faculty of Education at the University of Toronto for two years to do that. I got a call from a friend who was teaching at St. Michael's and one of the teachers had just died that August and they were looking for a history and English teacher.

While he jokes he didn't know anything about high school at the time, his friend assured him that all you had to do was know how to use a Gestetner (an early type of copy machine) and, after a brief interview with the principal who he already knew, the rest was, well, history.

I stayed there for 25 years, says Younder. I like working with young people, I enjoy seeing their enthusiasm, their desire to learn, and for some that didn't want to learn, it was a challenge. One of the things was I wasn't really a good student myself. I had a struggle in the learning process and how to study, and I didn't have all the skills and assistance the kids now have in helping them along. Guidance was limited, but I found I had some good teachers that helped me along the way; they gave me breaks, they gave me help after school, and I guess I want to repay that kind of thing. I felt kids responded to what I was trying to say and that was kind of a spark, that I had something to offer.

Indeed, seeing where his students have ended up has been part of that magic spark.

One such moment of magic, he said, happened when he was a debate coach and preparing one of his students, Michael Brown, to contend for the Churchill Medals in Communication.

Brown, a friend to this day, is now an Associate Judge at the Ontario Superior Court of Justice.

To be a teacher is not just an 8-4 job, you're really doing it 24-7, either preparing lessons, helping kids, attending events and, at the same time, trying to balance your family, he says. I learned more in a car or a bus travelling and going to a debate with kids

than I probably would learn in a classroom. It was in the stands, the locker rooms? when you're working with kids on a daily basis, I learned who they were, where they were coming from, their families, their backgrounds, their likes, their dislikes, all the troubles that they have.

?I think if you get inside a kid's head, there's a lot of things going on in there, and you as a teacher can directly and indirectly influence that in your teaching. Just by saying a few words in the hall like, 'Hey, good game last night,' 'Hey, do up your tie,' 'I really liked when you scored that goal,' you can instruct and, at the same time, praise. I think that's what I really enjoyed.?

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