

Best of Aurora Business celebrated at Chamber's Business Excellence Awards



The best of Aurora's business community came together to celebrate their own last Wednesday night as the Aurora Chamber of Commerce hosted its annual Business Excellence Awards and Celebration.

Emceed by Steve Falk, it was an evening to recognize outstanding businesses large and small, home entrepreneurs, non-profits and more.

"Tonight is all about recognizing the incredible businesses and non-profits in our community and the contributions they make to our Town," said Mayor Tom Mrakas. "I want to congratulate all finalists. You are truly setting the bar for business excellence in Aurora. Our business community truly is the lifeblood of our Town, providing jobs for so many residents and making our communities more vibrant and dynamic places.

"The reality is business owners and entrepreneurs all have a unique set of skills and attributes in order to succeed. You have to be willing to take on the risk and work incredibly long hours. You have to be creative, innovative and resilient. Here in Aurora, I see this in so many of you and I really couldn't be prouder to be Mayor of a Town with such strong and dynamic businesses."

Taking home top honours were:

Home Based Business: Stella Graphics

Non-Profit: Construct ? A Social Enterprise by Blue Door Shelters

Innovation: Axiom Group Inc.

Entrepreneur: Lighthouse Learning and Development Centre

Health and Wellness: Sparkle Pharmacy

Retail/Franchise: Coup de Foudre Ladies Luxury Lingerie

Community Participation: Mike Smith, Smith Rogers Financial

This week, in the first of a series of three articles, The Auroran will spotlight the winners of the Non-Profit, Innovation and Health &

Wellness Categories, with coverage continuing next week.

NON-PROFIT: CONSTRUCT

Celebrating the ?valuable contributions that non-profit organizations make to the community of Aurora, recognizing community service and leadership, Construct was nominated alongside the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame, the Salvation Army's Northridge Community Church, and the York Region Food Network.

?Construct is a social enterprise at Blue Door that helps prevent homelessness by helping people get into jobs that are well-paid and meaningful,? said CEO Michael Braithwaite in a video to mark the nomination, which unspooled before the audience assembled at the Royal Venetian Mansion. ?Since 2020, we have been able to put over 220 people into the trades. There are two parts to Construct: Getting people into the trades and into well-paying jobs and careers that lift them [and] we are also a full-scale construction company where we can do basement renovations, repair work, landscaping and that kind of work? We're so happy to be nominated for the Construct program. There are so many good groups and people doing great stuff in the community and to be among them, to be a nominee, we're just honoured.?

Accepting the trophy, he said Construct is ?nothing without the community behind us.?

?What I love about this is I was part of a failure, in a sense, for a long time because I was putting people into programs, well-meaning programs, that weren't breaking the cycle of poverty,? said Braithwaite from the podium. ?The Construct program breaks the cycle of poverty. It puts people into the trades? to build the housing we need and it also brings in revenue so we can actually build affordable housing, not just on the backs of taxpayers or on the backs of governments. It is eventually going to be self-sustaining, so it is very cool. We're honoured to be in this group of amazing charities and non-profits doing great work. It's just an honour, but to win even more so!?

INNOVATION ? AXIOM GROUP, INC.

Recognizing ?innovation and technology that is either leading-edge or supportive of business innovation, recognizing outstanding achievement in product development or technology, customer experience and commitment to the community, Axiom was nominated alongside MegaLab and Flow Water.

Axiom is a global automotive parts manufacturing company that CEO Perry Rizzo said in the nomination video is ?innovative in every sense of the word from designing and engineering new solutions, materials and products.?

?We're constantly challenging the status quo ?make things better, to think differently, and come up with better solutions,? he said. We invest a lot back in research and development and we're constantly engineering new solutions and developing new ideas. The definition of innovation is creativity, so allow the workplace to be creative and allow engineers and staff members to be creative ? it's really critical to breaking the paradigm of providing solutions?. It is important to service our customers and do the very best that we can to be a supplier of choice, but the employees play a critical role so we're constantly engaging employees and making sure that they understand that their thoughts and ideas are going to help us be successful.

?Being nominated for this award is surreal. It is always nice to at least be recognized and put into a great company of other companies trying to break the rules, moving themselves forward. It is part of our DNA from our inception. We have always been designing and engineering better solutions, so it is nice to be recognized.?

It was extra nice to take home the trophy, and from the podium Rizzo said the company came to Aurora 23 years ago with sales of \$4 million. Now, they employ over 300 people, have four facilities in the area, have sales in excess of \$146 million, and have expanded across North America with plants in the United States and Mexico.

?This can only be achieved by tracking great talent and great people. Innovation can only happen with funding, so it is important that

not only the company does its part with great engineering, great people, but of course we have to be in an environment that allows us to be collaborative, invest in Canada, and achieve greatness for the universities here, the great talent pools we have, and I am just proud that Axiom is founded on very simple principles: We build things. We create things. That's what drives me to come into work every day: employing people to create new innovations, new technologies, and bringing these solutions to global markets is really [turning] Axiom into a global player with respect from every customer from one corner to another.?

HEALTH & WELLNESS PROVIDER ? SPARKLE PHARMACY

The Health and Wellness Provider award recognizes those that ?exhibit exemplary, professional service and support to the community.? Vying for the trophy this year, alongside Sparkle, were Aurora Dental Studio, K.O. Club, and Studio 95.

In his nomination video, Sparkle Pharmacy owner Michael Khalil said the business was founded in 1984 before he took over in 2017.

?We are focused on our patients [and] we're focused on our community,? he said. ?We like to get to know our patients and that helps to facilitate better pharmaceutical care. Our staff, our patients, we're one team and that includes me and all the staff here. We work together and we try to help our customers. Our customers are also part of the family here and while trying to deliver great care for them we've also been known to laugh and cry together and really just feel like a family. The community and I both support each other and the reality is that it is a two-way street and we help with things and they help us grow. All of our patients here are my advertisement and they help to [bring] new customers in but, at the same time, it is an old-school local pharmacy.?

Accepting the award, he joked ?I didn't have to innovate much, just sell as many drugs as I can!?

?I remember when I first bought Sparkle, I originally said, ?Oh, I should join the Chamber because it is the mature thing to do and luckily it has turned out to be very helpful, so thank you. I do feel the Chamber is very active in Aurora and I think it helps all of us. A special congrats to all the nominees today.

?I would also like to say a funny thing about business is the most common thing people say to me is, ?You're never here?' a challenging thing in business is you're not always seen for the efforts you put in or the overnights or the paperwork. This award is really rewarding.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter