

## Board celebrates success of Williams student



**By Brock Weir**

As Megan Jana, a Grade 12 student at Dr. G.W. Williams High School, prepares to graduate and live out her dreams in the Big Apple, much of her time is spent laying a good foundation for the legacy she leaves behind.

In her term at the school, she has been an active member of its community, stepping up to the plate as a peer mentor to younger students, editing the school newspaper, participating on school council, and providing students with an outlet in areas she herself had identified as lacking.

Ms. Jana had a lot riding on her shoulders this month when she was the only Aurora student of twenty four honoured by the York Region District School Board in their 2013 Celebrating Student Success awards.

Honoured in a ceremony by Ken Thurston, Director of Education, the initiative recognizes student leaders and leadership throughout the school board. She was nominated for the award by teacher Mark Fuller, who heralded Megan as the complete 'package' of what a student should be: 'polite, articulate, charismatic' and an 'enthusiastic, sensitive, and caring person.'

She was singled out for her academic prowess, earning high marks across the board, and for having a positive impact on her fellow students.

'Utilizing the vast array of leadership experiences Megan had in her early years of high school, she identified a void in our school and sought to be a trailblazer within the arts,' said Mr. Fuller in his nomination. 'She created an Arts' Council, a multi-faceted group designed to support students with an artistic passion in areas such as drama, photography, and advertising.'

'The efforts of the Arts Council have promoted student work both within the school as well as in the local community. She is a shining example of someone who has shown consistent commitment to the improvement of her school community.'

Megan's efforts are not limited to the school community. When The Auroran caught up with Megan last week, she and her fellow students, many of them members of the Arts' Council, had taken over Fritzy's Frozen Yogurt at Bayview and Wellington for a special celebration as the school year draws to a close, helping raise money for student initiatives, such as their upcoming prom, through sales of the frosty treat.

Amid the balloons, streamers, and togas, Megan spoke of her 'shock' at being nominated, let alone winning one of these prestigious awards.

"I have so many peers in my school who are incredibly talented and incredibly driven, and the fact he would nominate my name out of that bunch of people is really flattering," she says. "Once I heard the news [that I had won] the first thing I did was jump up and down and hug Mr. Fuller. It was a really awesome moment."

In the lead-up to the awards, camera crews trailed each student around their own school, getting a slice of their daily life to show at the awards presentation. They caught her in action, working with others, and showing off some of the decorated locker doors spearheaded by the Arts' Council. To see and hear the accomplishments of the others across York Region added to the sense of honour, she says.

"It was incredible getting to represent Aurora in the event," she said. "I know so many students in Aurora who are so driven and so talented, and I felt so honoured to be able to represent a Town with so many incredible students."

When asked some of her influences in being proactive within her school community, Megan says it just happens when she finds something she's passionate about. Not really getting a sense there were all the artistic opportunities there could be within her school environment, she set out to do something about that.

"I thought, "You know what? There's no reason why I can't start something new," she says of her first inspiration. "The teachers at my school are incredibly supportive and they backed me up through the whole thing. Getting something started was a big challenge but once you get support from your peers just seeing their enthusiasm is what kept me motivated and seeing everybody get excited."

Since then, she says there has been an "incredible" response from her fellow students. With a healthy turnout in their first year, they spearheaded gallery events within their school, as well as at the Aurora Public Library, celebratory evenings at the school bringing together music and visual arts programs, and it has gained momentum.

Now as she prepares to leave the legacy behind, she is talking to younger group members to see who wants to step up to a leadership role. The candidates will be elected by their peers, but she says if the need ever arises, she's only a phone call away. A long-distance call.

Upon graduation, she is tackling Advertising and Marketing Communications at New York's Fashion Institute of Technology, a dream she has harboured since Grade 6.

"The first thing I did was jump around my mailbox when I had my acceptance letter and I was just on top of the world. I think the most exciting part was to share the news with the people who have been there with me on the whole journey - my teachers, my parents, my friends. They have been there through all of the struggles and all of the hardships and it has meant a lot to me. I think that was the most enjoyable part of it."

Her first goal? Meeting fellow Canadian Joe Zee, managing editor of Elle Magazine.

"He's from Toronto and that's how I found out about the school in grade 6," she says. "I want to go up to him, shake his hand, tell him my story and say, "I want to be you!"