

Citizen of the Year Cunningham formally recognized for volunteerism



Vern Cunningham has been formally recognized as Aurora's 2024 Citizen of the Year.

Cunningham, whose honour was announced this spring as part of the Town's Community Recognition Awards, was unable to attend the May 27 ceremony due to a long-planned holiday; but he stepped firmly into the spotlight on June 25 when he was officially lauded by local lawmakers.

"This award has been given out annually since 1970 to an Aurora resident who has made exceptional community-building contributions. Importantly, like all of our community recognition award winners, the Citizen of the Year exemplifies an individual's commitment, passion and dedication to strengthening our community through their volunteerism because, at the end of the day, volunteers are the heart of our community," said Mayor Tom Mrakas. "Vern has achieved a lot here in our community over the years. As a businessman, but also of course as volunteer. While running his very successful local business, Alutron, Vern helped support other business owners through his work at the Chamber, serving as a Board member in the early 2000s, chairing the Business [Excellence] Awards, and serving as an ambassador for the York Region Small Business Enterprise Centre.

"In his retirement, Vern doubled down on his commitment to strengthening our community, joining the Optimist Club and serving as president of the Probus club for two years, where he still remains on the Board. He has done other incredibly important volunteer work, including sitting on the Board of Bereaved Families of York Region and becoming a member of the Hope House Hospice Bereavement team."

Cunningham was saluted for joining the Board of the Aurora Seniors' Centre in 2022 and quickly, as Chair of the Fundraising Committee, bringing in more than \$15,000 to the organization, as well as his work as a founding member of the Aurora Whiskey Society. In addition to enjoying a dram or two, the society raises funds to support a range of community organizations, including CHATS (Community & Home Assistance to Seniors).

"Vern is a compassionate, selfless, community leader who has touched so many lives and whose work has made Aurora a stronger and better place," said Mayor Mrakas. "I feel honoured to know Vern and I am so thankful for the work that he has done in our community."

This gratitude was also expressed by the Man of the Hour at the Council podium after accepting the award.

?I think the key for any volunteers in Aurora or anywhere else in the world is we don't do it for something as beautiful as this,? said Cunningham, admiring the trophy. ?We do it because of a passion for the community that we live in and the people that we know.

?I have been a resident of Aurora now for over 35 years, I have seen it grow, and I have met a lot of residents. To be honest with you, I've made a lot of friends here and I am going to stay here until am not staying here anymore! Thank you one and all. It's a wonderful award to get and it is really the crowning part of my life.?

By Brock Weir