

Citizens recognized at annual Community Recognition Awards



By Brock Weir

Aurora's active volunteers, up-and-coming athletes, and those simply willing to lend a hand, received honours Monday night as the Town of Aurora celebrated their achievements at the Community Recognition Awards.

Hosted by Mayor Geoffrey Dawe, and attended by Councillors John Abel, Michael Thompson, Evelyn Buck, John Gallo, Sandra Humfries, Wendy Gaertner, and Chris Ballard, those recognized ranged from people who have kept Aurora beautiful by planting trees and flowers to those exemplifying what it means to be a good neighbour.

"The award recipients have enriched the lives of our Town's residents, and I am very pleased to see that those residents have stepped forward to acknowledge their peers," said Mayor Dawe. "It is why we say, 'You're in good company' in Aurora. Volunteerism is an indispensable element to our Town and it is really what makes us great. They share their skills and life experience for the benefit of others. Our residents are greatly enriched by your generosity and served by your civic commitment."

First recognised in the category for five years of voluntary service were John Grant and Nancee Webb for their work at the Aurora Community Arboretum, William "Bill" Hack for his work with the Optimist Club of Aurora, Joan Stephenson for clocking up over 2,000 hours of volunteer service at the Aurora Seniors' Centre, and Branislava Milosevic for her work with the Aurora Garden and Horticultural Society.

For their 10 years of community service, Eric Clement was singled out for his work in the Arboretum, while Anne Collard, Gloria Smith, and Evelyn Meleta were honoured for their work with the Seniors' Centre.

Karen Fullbrook's 17 years of work with the Arboretum was recognized in the 15 Year Category before those who have put in 20 years or more had their due. These were Madge Ford and Margaret Howard Gunn for the Horticultural Society, as well as Robert Gaby and Greg Way for the Optimists.

Perhaps the youngest honouree in the room, 15-year-old Jared Janicek was recognized with the Civic Appreciation Award for representing Ontario as a champion star on the trampoline.

"At just 15, Jared has travelled across Canada competing in various levels of competition with trampoline," said Mayor Dawe. "After recently being crowned provincial champion, he led Team Ontario to the Eastern Canadian Championship where he placed fourth overall and was a top member of Team Ontario who captured the silver medal. It is truly inspiring to see Aurora's youth being recognized in this way."

The Outstanding Individual Achievement Award was given to Jan Freedman of Jan's Country Pantry for her volunteer work with the Aurora Farmers' Market, Seniors' Centre, and the York Region Farm Fresh Group.

The Outstanding Individual Achievement Award for non-profits went to the Special Olympics, while Chris Zhang was recognized with the Good Neighbour Award.

“Chris Zhang truly exemplifies what it means to be a good neighbour, with a remarkable attitude and a sense of community,” said Mayor Dawe, citing his work cleaning up the properties of neighbours when they are on vacation, and providing a hand with recycling and waste management programs.

Recognizing those who have made a mark in Aurora's recreation, Bill Kizovski was presented the Bob Harman Memorial Award for his decades as a volunteer coach and sports mentor with the Aurora Basketball League, Aurora Youth Soccer Club, and within schools.

“It blows my mind,” said Ms. Freedman on receiving her award. When asked what drives her to give back, she cites four victorious battles with cancer giving her perspective.

“It is knowing that every day I am on this side of the grass is an absolute gift,” she said. “It is the time in my life to give back. People have been absolutely wonderful, the Town has been incredibly welcoming to me. Whatever energy I have, this is my time to do things for people.”

Clement was introduced to the Arboretum by his parents, Irene and John, when he was just six. Now 26, he has grown along with the trees he has planted and that is part of what keeps him coming back.

“I enjoy being outside there and it is nice to be out and active,” he said. “I always like coming back a few years later and seeing how the trees have grown.”