

Community Recognition Awards recognize residents who have made Aurora a better place



Community builders were saluted as 'the mortar that tightly binds the bricks of our community' on Monday night at Aurora's annual Community Recognition Awards.

Recognizing Aurora residents of all ages, the annual Community Recognition Awards (CRA), are held to pay tribute to those who have given back in the areas like the arts, community safety, and simply embodying what it means to be a good neighbour.

'Volunteers enrich our community and play a critical role in mentoring others, supporting charitable causes, running sporting and cultural programs, and organizing important initiatives that support our Town and its residents,' said Mayor Tom Mrakas, serving as the evening's emcee. 'They are the mortar that tightly binds the bricks of our community.'

'How many of you have scrolled through photos of icebergs? I know they have certainly caught my attention before. As well, many of us are familiar with the saying, 'the tip of the iceberg,' which really means that something is only a small part of a much larger situation.'

'This analogy can be stretched to reflect that of volunteerism. When you drive by parks or visit the local recreation centres, you see sports teams in action. The actual sports teams in action is the tip of the iceberg and the volunteers required to coach the teams, motivate the players, organize the games, get the field ready, communicate with all the participants is the larger portion of the iceberg. That portion reflects the effort to make those games possible and what we don't even realize is happening to make the game come to fruition.

'Without volunteers, these experiences simply wouldn't be possible, and without volunteer opportunities, volunteers would miss out on a truly gratifying experience ' and the rewarding experience of giving back to the community and helping your fellow neighbours.'

YOUTH VOLUNTEER AWARD

LAILA DORAN

Laila Doran has been giving back to the community since the age of nine when she started selling fidget toys to help youth mental health impacted by the pandemic. 'Over the last year, Laila has collected milk bags from the community to make multiple mattresses for the homeless,' reads her citation. 'She also helps her mom in purchasing food for the local food pantry and community fridges; in addition to wanting to ensure everyone has a comfortable place to sleep, she also wants to ensure they have food to enjoy. Laila embodies the true saying that one can do anything they can put their mind to. She is well-spoken and is a wonderful example of how we should participate in giving back to our community. For Laila to win this award reaffirms her actions are positive and need to continue to help other youth understand that their impact is important and valued.'

SENIOR VOLUNTEER AWARD

BRIAN & DIANNE HARRISON

There are some people who volunteer because they believe it is the right thing to do, reads their citation. Then there are rare exceptional groups of people who show kindness because that's just who they are. For 18 years, Brian and Dianne have been organizing the Christmas card campaign by getting the whole community involved, such as school children; youth, seniors, and church members who write Christmas cards to be sent to members of the Canadian military posted overseas. An estimated 70,000 cards have been sent to date. It has been wonderful to see so many people help and get involved in their leadership of writing these. The Harrisons were also recognized for their tireless work with the Salvation Army and Northridge Community Church, volunteerism with Guide programs, and helping the Aurora Food Pantry.

GREEN AWARD

WINDFALL ECOLOGY CENTRE

Recognizing individuals and organizations that support the protection, preservation, sustainability or conservation of our natural environment, this year's Green Award went to Windfall Ecology Centre. Improving our natural environment takes a lot of hard work, and knowledge sharing which the Windfall Ecology Centre has been doing for over 20 years and has contributed substantially and sustainably within Aurora. Some of their programming aims to educate residents and businesses on our collective responsibility to reduce impacts in the areas of energy conservation, renewable energy, electric mobility and water protection. Two of their signature programs include Residential Energy Efficiency and Climate Wise Building Network. Their Home Energy Assessments, help homeowners assess their energy efficiency with home audits and provide recommendations on how to proceed to make their homes more green. Additionally, they provide information on rebates and government funds that can be used to reduce the cost to retrofit their home.

ARTS & CULTURE AWARD

SERGEY WAIN-FELLOWS

Sergey Wain-Fellows was the recipient of the Arts & Culture Award, which honours individuals or groups who have enhanced the community through their support of culture, music, visual, performing or literary arts. Sergey volunteers leading weekly art classes for assisted living residents of Sunrise Aurora. Sergey is always anticipated by the residents and their families. He is very patient, calm, and caring. He helps to provide Live with Artistry programming for our residents. He has helped Sunrise of Aurora many times to organize and run art shows and auctions, for charity purposes. Sergey dedicates his time to provide the residents with his knowledge and talent, teach them and help them to create beautiful art pieces. His painting classes are one of the most popular programs at Sunrise. Sergey is currently working on a few upcoming events such as a Sip and Paint Family Night and Summer Art Show with the charity auction.

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AWARD

AURORA LIONS CLUB

Now nearing its 80th anniversary, the Aurora Lions received the Community Leadership Award, dedicated to those who have enhanced the community through demonstrated leadership in charitable giving, civic engagement or community spirit. Whenever the Aurora Lions Club gets together, problems get smaller and communities get better. There are so many projects and assistance they have provided such as gifts for senior residents at Chartwell, continuous support for three hospices, support for local athletic teams and environmental support with planting trees in the Aurora Arboretum. Some of their signature projects include the Christmas Basket Program where they partner with the Salvation Army to provide food and gifts for less fortunate families in Town. They go into the Senior Kindergarten level class to provide vision and hearing screening. This [routine] testing provided and delivered by the Lions Club members helps to determine if a child needs to see a professional. The Club also does a lot of fundraising to support projects. They created the Dog Walk for Dog Guides where they raise money through a walk to help the

Lions Foundation of Canada provide service dogs to those that need them at no cost.?

THE GOOD NEIGHBOUR AWARD

ANDREW WATT

Created to honour someone who embodies what it means to be a good neighbour, this year's award was presented to Andrew Watt. ?Andy has been in his neighbourhood for more than 20 years and during this time he has continually been helping out his neighbours. During the pandemic he became the neighbourhood bike mechanic and encouraged the families on the street to allow him to tune up their bikes and in no time he had almost the whole street out biking. Many will recall our last snow fall as a really heavy one. Immediately following the snow fall, Andy went and got out his snow blower and not only did his driveway and windrow but ended up doing almost every single driveway on his street. This wasn't just a one-time gesture, whenever Andy has been able to help out during weather events he has been there for everyone. Andy does these acts of kindness without any expectation of thanks. People on their street know how lucky they are to have such a great neighbour like Andy. Andy's efforts are contagious and makes everyone want to extend their time and energy to help someone. Aside from being a great neighbour on their street, he is also a great neighbour in the overall community as he also coaches hockey and has been contributing to the hockey life in Aurora.?

COMMUNITY SAFETY AWARD

CENTRAL GIRLS HOCKEY ASSOCIATION

The Central Girls Hockey Association was honoured with the Community Safety Award, presented to those who have supported initiatives improving community safety. The team was recognized for their fundraising efforts to make a SaveStation mobile defibrillator available at Machell Park. ?The She Shoots, She Saves fundraising project was created to raise funds for this specific project, which provides an extra layer of cardiac safety. A SaveStation creates an increased level of safety in a busy park that is used by the community all-year round. In addition to the SaveStation, the association's social media campaign was used to help raise additional awareness regarding cardiac safety. Hockey teams usually need to fundraise for their own tournaments and activities and the fact that the Central York Girls Hockey Association was also able to support this program is pretty tremendous.?

GOOD BUSINESS AWARD

OAKRIDGE'S FASHIONS

Each year, the Good Business Award is presented to a business that has shown its commitment to corporate responsibility and community involvement through ongoing charitable causes ? something Oakridge's Fashions has exemplified. ?Oakridge's Fashions, led by owner Deb Clark, has been involved in many projects helping to support and serve the community. One of her special projects started in 2020 has been the ?Giving Tree' she created which was staged in her store front as part of the store's holiday décor, which was filled with ornaments. These ornaments were available for purchase with all of the proceeds going back into the community. In 2022, the ?Giving Tree' expanded to additional products such as bags, candles and even a children's book written by Deb herself. More than \$10,000 was raised and was divided between the Aurora Food Pantry, Belinda's Place and Marquee Theatrical Productions. In addition to the ?Giving Tree,' Oakridge's Fashions has also supported the Canadian Federation of University Women by providing funding for a scholarship award. One of Deb's goals was to support education and women of all ages, which this scholarship does. The store has also been home to hosting many fundraising events supporting Southlake, the Cancer Society, Marquee Theatrical Productions, the Aurora Food Bank and many others.?

INCLUSIVITY AWARD

DAVID HEARD

David Heard is the recipient of this year's Inclusivity Award, which is presented each year to an individual, group or business that has contributed to making Aurora a more accessible and inclusive place. David has been working and volunteering with the Aurora Farmers' Market providing his time and his talent in entertaining the people at the market and in creating a wonderful atmosphere for customers and vendors alike. Music can make people feel safe and at ease which is what David has achieved. He also curates the song choices and volumes so that music can be enjoyed by all people, as some people are very sensitive to noise but when it is handled correctly ALL can enjoy it. Through the pandemic David came out and entertained weekly with no expectation of remuneration. Back in May of 2022, a huge storm came through the Market, he was a huge help in making announcements to help evacuate the market so that no harmful impact was sustained. David has a gift in being able to make everyone feel like they are part of the whole. He has become a prominent reason for why the Market is thriving, especially during the pandemic which was such a difficult time for everyone. The compliments from patrons at the market is always so positive about how wonderful they felt by his music. It is the atmosphere that David is so passionate about creating which has been a wonderful addition to the market.

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter