

## Community Recognition Awards salutes individuals making a difference

**By  
Brock Weir**

If there's one thing  
that unites them, it's humbleness.

What they do, day in  
and day out, might not seem like a big deal to them, but for those looking on,  
and particularly for those directly benefiting from the work they do, it's  
huge.

As were the ovations  
they received Monday night as they were celebrated by the Town of Aurora at the  
2019 Community Recognition Awards.

Aurora residents  
were saluted May 27 for contributions as varied as helping local kids safely  
cross the street on their way to school or helping new Canadians adapt to their  
new homes after particularly challenging circumstances in their homelands.

Volunteers are the  
backbone of our community," said Mayor Tom Mrakas. "Their dedication, passion  
and leadership are an inspiration for others in our community to help those in  
need. Aurora's volunteers, as a collective, have helped shape our Town's  
character. They attract like-minded people who live, work and play in Aurora,  
and embody the same spirit of compassion. Aurora volunteers use their energy to  
make a difference in the lives of others. They focus on their civic duty to  
help their fellow neighbours and, in turn, this kindness brings our community  
closer together."

First to be  
recognized was Amanda Bishop, a student at Aurora High School, with the Youth  
Recognition Award.

The Youth  
Recognition Award is presented each year to a young citizen for their volunteer  
efforts, and who has made a significant contribution to their community by  
demonstrating their commitment to being a positive leader.

Amanda is always  
trying to educate and motivate her peers in the community to challenge  
themselves and explore different possibilities," reads Amanda's citation.  
Amanda does this by creating free opportunities for learning, which includes developing  
a free week-long summer camp, teaching girls in Grades 5 ? 8 to code and design  
websites. With her drive and initiative, Amanda also created and organized a  
conference called Why Code Aurora, which brought together professional women to  
talk about IT in business. Amanda also shares her ideas when she volunteers by

teaching a free computer course at Regency Acres Public School. Amanda is an outstanding inspiration to other youth in our community, particularly young girls, by encouraging them to become involved with Science, Technology, Education and Math.?

The Green Award is presented to an individual, business or community organization that supports the protection, preservation, sustainability or conservation of our natural environment. The award celebrates those who share the Town's commitment to creating a greener community ? like this year's recipient, John Wilson.

?John works tirelessly as a Director of the Aurora Community Arboretum, spending hundreds of hours acquiring, planting and protecting trees and bushes that enhance the health of the Arboretum. John joined the Arboretum as a volunteer in 2008 and has since participated in the planting of over 2,000 trees a year and is an integral part of combating invasive species. John is also an educator, arranging for speakers and leading tours of the Arboretum, telling visitors in detail about the flora and fauna. John has received many awards for his green initiatives throughout his lifetime and we are very thankful that John shares the Town's commitment to creating a greener community.?

A celebration of green initiatives took on a different colour with the next award, the Arts and Culture Award, which went to the Aurora Winter Blues Festival. This award, inspired by the Johnson family, is presented to an individual or group that has enhanced the community through their support or promotion of culture, music, visual, performing or the literary arts.

?The Aurora Winter Blues Festival is completely run by volunteers, ensuring that all proceeds go back into the programming of musical initiatives for the future. The Aurora Winter Blues Festival is not solely a one-weekend event; it is also comprised of a musical kick-off event, pop-up musical performances throughout the Town, and free opportunities for musicians to attend educational workshops. This visionary approach to enhancing the music scene in Aurora means that residents can continue their engagement with these artists throughout a month-long celebration. The Aurora Winter Blues Festival continues to engage the community through music and proudly supports artists in our community.?

The Community Leadership Award, presented to an individual, youth, business, community organization or non-profit that has enhanced the Town through their commitment and giving went this year to 100 Youth Who Care ? Central York Region.

?100 Youth Who Care ? Central York Region is a volunteer-run local not-for-profit established in 2016. With the support of parent mentors, the 100 Youth Who Care Youth Committee volunteers are responsible for organizing and facilitating their quarterly meetings for this organization. In just over two years, these youth

have raised awareness and increased engagement among their peers, growing the organization from 10 youth members to 40. The youth in this group demonstrate exceptional leadership skills, compassion for the community, and have inspired their peers to donate almost \$7,000 to important local charities and causes.?

#### The Good Neighbour

Award is intended to recognize someone who embodied what it means to be a good neighbour, whether it is through acts of compassion or simple acts of kindness. Belinda Pianezza, this year's recipient, has gone above and beyond to fit the bill.

?Belinda can be

described as compassionate, kind, generous and thoughtful towards all of her neighbours. After living in the neighbourhood for more than 25 years, Belinda is friendly to everyone. She has helped some of her new neighbours integrate into the community as some are new immigrants to Canada. She ensures they feel welcome and supported. As well, when neighbours are on vacation, she will shovel their driveway, cut their lawns and take on many other tasks. Her kindness emanates from the bottom of her heart and it is evident how much she cares about her neighbours and her community. Belinda goes above and beyond to make her neighbourhood a wonderful and supportive place to live.?

Another person who

helps neighbours navigate their communities is Lynne Camilleri, who is this year's recipient of the Community Safety Award, which recognizes persons dedicated to the development, promotion or support of initiatives that improve community safety.

?Like all crossing

guards, Lynne always places safety first, but she goes above and beyond her role and makes it a priority to learn about all of the families that cross the street daily. Lynne knows everyone by name and has developed a trust where pedestrians know she always has their best interests at hand. She also educates people on why certain practices help ensure safety at intersections. Lynne's focus is on building a safer community for families where parents feel confident that their children will make it safely across busy intersections in Town. Parents in the neighbourhood feel very confident that Lynne is always looking out for the safety and well-being of their children.?

Realtor Eric

McCartney of Century 21 Heritage Group, is this year's recipient of the Good Business Award, which celebrates a business that has shown commitment to corporate responsibility and community involvement through its ongoing support of charitable causes, events or programs.

?Eric is very

involved in his community. He is an avid volunteer and has adopted three parks, boulevards and walkways in Town. He volunteers his time with the St. John Ambulance Therapy Dogs, the Canadian Red Cross Disaster Response and many others. Eric regularly helps throughout his community by shovelling snow and picking up food

and medications for others in the community that are unable to go out. Eric supports many events in Aurora such as the Aurora Studio Tour, Doors Open and has served on (The Town's) Parks, Recreation & Cultural Services Advisory Committee.?

Rounding out the night to some of the biggest cheers was the presentation of the Inclusivity Award, which celebrates those who help make Aurora a more accessible and inclusive place to live, work and play. This is the driving force of this year's recipients ? Special Olympics Ontario ? Aurora.

?For more than 10 years, Special Olympics Aurora has made sport in Aurora more inclusive to people with intellectual disabilities. Special Olympics Aurora has opened up access to, and promoted sports training in the following seven areas: swimming, basketball, golf, softball, bocce, rhythm gym and soccer. The ability to play, train and compete within an organized sport program has created inclusive community spaces in Aurora for many athletes. Special Olympics Aurora also offers many volunteer opportunities with Special Olympics Ontario, as well as leadership training programs and health education to its athletes. Special Olympics Aurora works hard to secure volunteers to run its sports and secures spots in facilities for its clubs by providing funding through fundraising, sponsorships and donations.?