

Community Recognition Awards shine light on selfless giving

Lynne Camilleri was speechless when she learned she was set to receive Aurora's Community Safety Award.

As a school crossing guard, she has passionately dedicated her life to ensuring students and their families get to and from school safely, forging relationships with those she protects, never pausing for a moment to look for recognition.

But, she received just such recognition last year when she was nominated for the prize as part of the Town's Community Recognition Awards ? and now you can step up to shine a light on the unsung heroes all around you.

Nominations are now open for the 2020 Community Recognition Awards, which recognize deserving residents, businesses and organizations for their efforts in making Aurora a better place.

?People volunteer for a variety of reasons, but rarely is there recognition of what they're volunteering for,? says Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora. ?This community simply can't be as fantastic as it is without the volunteers that we have and the impact they have directly on us. For those that benefit from seeing the magic that volunteers create, we really want to encourage them to take the time to fill out a nomination form.?

Nominations are now being accepted online through April 3, and include: the Volunteer Service Award; the Youth Volunteer Award; the Green Award, recognizing those who are making a difference on our environment; Arts & Culture; Community Leadership; the Good Neighbour Award; the Good Business Award; Community Safety; Inclusivity; and Citizen of the Year.

New this year is the ?Senior Volunteer Award?, presented to a citizen above the age of 55 who, ?through their volunteer efforts, has made a significant contribution to the community and has demonstrated their commitment to being a positive leader today and in the future.?

?Currently, we have a Youth award and this year a community member brought forward the idea of a Senior Award, which has been enthusiastically embraced,? says Ms. Ware. ?Seniors in Aurora are so active and come from so many talented backgrounds that they are really an important group within the community and I am hoping for lots of nominations in that specific category.?

Yet, there are some awards, in Ms. Ware's view, that continue to fly under the radar.

The Good Neighbour Award is just one such example.

?Aurora is made up with such exceptional residents and each of those residents is somebody's neighbour,? says Ms. Ware. ?A neighbour doesn't mean the geographic address beside you; a neighbour is someone who embodies what it means to be a good neighbour within a vibrant neighbourhood. A neighbourhood could be a retirement home, it could be a residential neighbourhood, an apartment building ? it is not the bricks and mortar stuff that matters, but the simple acts of kindness and compassion that a Good Neighbour demonstrates to keep our neighbourhoods connected.?

The Inclusivity Award, recognizing those who have contributed to making Aurora a more accessible or inclusive place to live, work and play for ?all people regardless of race, ancestry, national and ethnic origin, creed, religion, age, gender identity, gender expression, marital status, family status or ability? is also sometimes overlooked by potential nominators.

?Our community becomes more and more inclusive year after year and it happens because there are passionate people in the community who bring forward ideas for improvement, to make the area as inclusive as possible,? says Ms. Ware.

Additionally, the award which so moved Ms. Camilleri last year, can also fall behind.

?This goes to an individual for the development, promotion, or support of initiatives that improve our community safety,? says Ms. Ware. ?This includes those who go above and beyond in our neighbourhoods to improve the overall safety of it. We know good deeds are being done out there to ensure our community remains safe, but this is one category where we struggle to get nominations and I think it is just those who have seen the safety improvements maybe aren't realizing that there is this award that they could nominate a person for.

?Lynne, she was absolutely speechless to have been recognized in this fashion. She does it from deep down in the bottom of her heart. The fact that she touched and made so many families feel safer sending their kids to school, it was such a humbling experience for her that she was literally moved to tears. Being able to watch that from the outside in was just amazing, such a humbling experience to see somebody be recognized when truly they are not doing it for that.

?I think volunteers and advocates are so busy doing what they do well that the busiest volunteer often doesn't have time or realize these programs exist out there because the fundamental thing we hear over and over again is people don't volunteer to be recognized, they volunteer because they choose to make a difference. I think we really need to press our efforts towards those who see who the difference-makers are in the community and encourage them to take an active role in this process. I am not sure I have met a resident or someone in the community at some point that has not volunteered or given back and been proud to do so. That truly is what makes Aurora special

and stand out.?

For more information on the 2020 Community Recognition Awards, including nomination forms, visit aurora.ca/cra.

By Brock Weir