

## Eleven local sports organizations celebrated at Sport Aurora's 14th Annual Breakfast of Champions



Sport Aurora's 14th Annual Breakfast of Champions celebrated the crowning achievements of eleven local sports organizations on Sunday morning at Stonehaven Banquet Hall.

One of Sport Aurora's premier annual events, the Breakfast of Champions attracted scores of dignitaries including MPP Dawn Gallagher Murphy who presented medals and congratulated dozens of athletes and coaches individually on stage.

The event was hosted for the eleventh consecutive year by Aurora Tigers Governor and Everest Hockey Director Jim Thomson.

The community-centred Thomson also subbed in for suddenly-stricken keynote speaker Grey Brett, Sport Aurora's Athlete of the Year in 2023. Thomson, a rugged ex-NHLer who played for the Hartford Whalers, New Jersey Devils, Ottawa Senators, the Anaheim Ducks, and most notably the LA Kings with whom he battled for the Stanley Cup alongside Wayne Gretzky in 1993, offered engaging anecdotes to the audience about the importance of hope, resilience, and perseverance.

Ron Weese, President of Sport Aurora, was inspired by Thomson's keynote address: "One of the highlights this morning was Jim Thomson's performance as our Emcee and Guest Speaker. I'm always interested in Jim Thomson's inspirational story. His message about never giving up on your dream, and being thankful are lessons about life from a former NHLer that athletes in our community need to hear."

Weese was also moved by the stories brought forth by the coaches in their presentations.

"Every year, I like to hear the stories from our coaches. It's inspiring to see the reactions of our large audiences to the success of so many teams. The coaches also get a chance to thank their players and parents directly in an open setting. This event is an important forum for public appreciation of players, coaches, parents, and community volunteers."

Two of the community volunteers in the audience were Aurora Tigers Captain Simon Howard and his brother, NCAA D1 RIT commit Luke Howard. Both Tigers greeted guests and connected to the community as leaders of the Town's Junior A hockey team.

The appearance of at least two Tigers is an ongoing tradition at the Breakfast of Champions, as it is to have the team's owner serve as Emcee.

Thomson who met all the players and coaches on stage and extended congratulations to each with a handshake and good word enjoyed the gathering of local athletes and the recognition they received while praising the diligence of Sport Aurora: "Ron, Laurie, Sandra, Neil, and Alan put so much energy and effort into the athletes and families. The good they do in their community it's great to be part of it. We didn't have this kind of community recognition when I was growing up. This event takes me back to my childhood. We'd have a year-end banquet for our team which was fun, but we never had a chance to celebrate with other sports."

In addition to acknowledging the special experience afforded the attendees at this year's Breakfast of Champions, Thomson hoped that his words had an impact on the young athletes gathered at Stonehaven: "I hope I was able to plant that seed of encouragement in them. As one coach said to our team, 'Somebody here is going to do great things as an athlete.' I was letting them know that no one seemed to believe that I'd make it to the NHL but through my hardships, through resilience, and perseverance, my NHL dream came true. Someone in the room today will do great things on a big stage. Meeting all the athletes and families makes this a special day for me."

It was a special day for Rocco Colarossi who was presented with the Coach of the Year Award by ASHoF inductee and Sport Aurora administrator Alan Dean.

Colarossi acknowledged in his acceptance address that he was "recently married" which elicited much applause and he admitted as a result that "he hadn't had much time to prepare a speech" which amused the assembly.

The Shaolin Martial Arts instructor noted the personal and organizational significance of the Sport Aurora Coach of the Year Award: "I'm thankful and appreciative of the award. It was so nice to get recognition for the school, too."

The veteran coach expressed how much satisfaction he derives from developing local athletes: "Watching the athletes grow as competitors and young people is one of the best parts of coaching. Some of them started as nine-year-olds with me. Now, they're 15 and one is internationally-ranked. Ron Piklas is undefeated this year he has the top fighting record in our School at 13-0. It's a special achievement for Shaolin and the sport. Sanda [kick boxing] is not huge sport in Canada yet, but events like these give it a spotlight. It's much bigger in Europe and Asia, but two of our athletes Dan Wakefield and Ron Piklas have qualified for our national kick boxing team."

In addition to Shaolin Martial Arts Canada, ten other organizations paraded their championship teams and individuals into the spotlight of the appreciative audience of 200 who also enjoyed a delicious hot breakfast prior to the festivities.

Thomson welcomed to the stage coaches and athletes from Evolution Gymnastics, York Artistic Swimming Club, York Curling Club, Aurora Master Ducks, Kids Super Gym, AMHA's U15BB rep team resplendent in their matching yellow and black hoodies, Special Olympics Ontario, Cavallo Martial Arts, and Global Gymnastics.

The AMHA's absent U16BB team was recognized by Thomson for winning a significant tournament last season.

Also absent was Sport Aurora's 2025 Athlete of the Year Eugene Wang a table tennis player whose championship tournament in South Carolina conflicted with the event.

Wang a competitor at three Pan Am Games and a four-time Olympian encouraged "all the young athletes to remember that every match is a chance to learn, to grow, and to become stronger."

"Winning is great, but the most important thing is to keep improving and to enjoy the journey."

Wang through an email reminded the athletes assembled to "Believe in yourself, respect your opponents, and always give your best."

Despite some of these conspicuous absences and the sudden sickness of Grey Brett, Sport Aurora's Executive Director Laurie Mueller—one of the chief organizers of the event—captured the atmosphere at Stonehaven on Sunday morning.

“The highlight of the event is the energy in the room. Every single year, there's a new kind of energy. You feel the energy and the pride of each of the teams being honored. You feel good when you leave here.”

Weese, in his closing address, acknowledged the attendance of three Aurora Sports Hall of Fame inductees. Paolina Allan, Jim Thomson, and Alan Dean were warmly received by attendees as was the recognition of sponsors that made the Breakfast of Champions possible: the Patron Sponsor E360S; Event Sponsors Microtel by Wyndham and Nothers Signs and Recognition; Table Sponsors Masterducks Swimming and LeGallais Veterinary Hospital; and Gift Sponsors—also LeGallais Veterinary Hospital.

By Jim Stewart Local Journalism Initiative Reporter