

Hundreds pay tribute to Saberi at Celebration of Life



Hundreds gathered at the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex on Saturday, May 2, to celebrate the life of Sam Saberi, owner of the popular Tina's Grill, and Aurora's 2022 Citizen of the Year.

Saberi, who left behind a legacy of community building and giving, died suddenly on April 21, aged just 41.

Community leaders joined the Saberi family at the SARC where the floor of the arena quickly filled with residents from Aurora and beyond who had been touched by Sam's legacy of giving.

"Sam was a respected member of the community, a wonderful friend, a trusted neighbour, and someone who genuinely cared about the people around him," said Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MPP Michael Parsa, who was one of several speakers paying tribute to Saberi at the podium. "Whether it was through his kindness, his support, or simply a presence, Sam made people feel seen. He made them feel valued and simply supported."

He was, Parsa said, a person people could always depend on, and someone who "gave selflessly and genuinely."

"He really cared about the people in the community," he continued. "His dedication to serving the community wasn't just something he did, it is who Sam was and the values he lived by every single day. His impact is reflected in the love, respect, and gratitude so many people in the community feel today."

Parsa said he first met Saberi when he went to Tina's Grill and "knew right away he was a special guy." Noting his love for the Philadelphia Flyers, he noted that, in this community, only Sam could "put up a whole bunch of posters and signs of another NHL team, get away with it, and be loved by everybody."

"To the entire Saberi family, thank you so much for sharing Sam with all of us," he concluded. "Sam will be deeply missed, but he'll never be forgotten, and his memory will continue to inspire all of us. I learned a lot from Sam and I'm sure others will tell you the same, and I know you're very proud of him because we all are. As a life-long Leafs fan, I've never been known to cheer for any other team, but I've publicly posted for the remainder of the NHL playoffs I'll be rooting for the Philadelphia Flyers, who have a special guest waiting for them."

Saberi's love for the Flyers was also noted in a moving eulogy offered by his niece, Maya Hamer, who was accompanied at the podium by her brother, Mason.

Maya recalled joining her uncle at a Leafs-Flyers game and the fun they had making special signs for the game. Hers said, "Go Leafs Go," while Sam's simply said, "I failed as an uncle!"

"Looking back on that day, he never failed me as an uncle; he was the best uncle I could ever ask for," she said, adding he was her number-one supporter. "Although he never gave me a cousin, he did have a child of his own, which was Tina's Grill. He loved that restaurant, and loved everyone who supported it, especially at times like COVID. Everyone's support just pushed them through, and I know he appreciated every single one of you guys so much.

"I know Sam would really appreciate every single one of you for coming today, so every time you see the colours of orange or black together, every time the Flyers win, or the Eagles, or the Blue Jays, or the Raptors, still think of him. Every time Morgan Wallen comes on the radio or country music, think of him. Every time you witness silly pranks? think of him. Most importantly, every time you see someone that has a smile that fills the entire room, always puts others before themselves, and always shares kindness with everyone, think of him. That's the legacy he left behind, and we must continue it.

"I encourage you to reach out and give back to the community. Commit acts of kindness and treat others with love, as that is what Sam would do. His name was big in Aurora, but his heart was even bigger."

Tina's Grill, located on McClellan Way, just east of Bathurst Street, re-opened for business, for the first time since Saberi's passing, on May 5.

Sharing a message from her grandparents, Hossein and Azar, Maya noted it was their way of keeping Sam's legacy alive in the community.

"When Sam went to heaven on April 21, we thought our lives were over too and there was no future for us," said Azar and Hossein in the message delivered by their granddaughter. "But after all of your support and the unbelievable comments, it gave us enough strength to follow his heart and legacy he had left behind. We go back to work to keep his name and legacy alive forever. We promise this from the bottom of our hearts."

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