

Innovation, collaboration celebrated at Business Excellence Awards



By Brock Weir

Innovation and collaboration were the orders of the day as the Aurora Chamber of Commerce celebrated the best and brightest in local business at the 2018 Business Excellence Awards.

Held at the Royal Venetian on Thursday night, the ceremony celebrated the achievements of large and small businesses, young entrepreneurs, business that have recently taken a bold step into the community, and those who give back.

"It is such a great pleasure and great honour to be here to recognize everyone who has been nominated," said Mayor Geoff Dawe at the start of the event, which showcased 21 individual nominated businesses.

But, in the seven categories, there could only be seven winners.

Taking home top honours were Sigma Promotions and Cube Packaging, which were recognized with the Small Business and Large Business Awards respectively.

"At Sigma Promotions, the easiest way to look at what we do is put logos on products, but what we do that's different from our competition is teach people how to use those promotional products in a strategic way to grow their business," said Sigma founder Nikki Pett. "At the end of the day, what we do is we help businesses grow faster by the proper use of promotional items as well as cultivating relationships. What truly sets us apart is our culture. My priority is to grow a bunch of leaders who are full of confidence that feel empowered, that will grow other leaders in our community."

Cube Packaging's Len Chopin accepted the Large Business award on behalf of his team of over 100 employees. Founded in 2009, he said Cube Packaging's operations have more than doubled since its inception, now calling a 170,000 square foot facility home.

"It's quite an honour and surprise," said Mr. Chopin at the podium. "People are our strength and our key to success."

Sigma was nominated alongside Skyview Family & Cosmetic Dentistry and Transcend Wellness, while Cube Packaging's fellow nominees included Almac Industrial Systems and Prime Data.

People are also the strength of Neighbourhood Network, whose win in the Non-Profit of the Year category coincided with its tenth anniversary. Nominated alongside Shine Through the Rain and Welcoming Arms, it was a fitting win for Neighbourhood Network because, as explained by Erin Cerenzia who accepted on behalf of the group, they work alongside both organizations every day.

"Thank you so much, first and foremost to the Aurora Chamber of Commerce for recognizing us with this award," she said. "It is an extra honour and privilege for us because we're actually recognized in the same category as two of the partners we work with every day. We're so proud to be able to support you in the work that we do. I would also like to honour and recognize my team behind me. You're not just a team, you're family and it is such an honour to work alongside you."

Also recognized for their contributions to Aurora was Keller Williams Realty, which took home the Community Involvement Award after being nominated alongside Lighthouse Legal Services and Treefrog. Accepted by Keller Williams' Marvin Alexander, he said the company prides itself on being "an open book company that fosters a culture unlike any other."

"We pride ourselves and we give back to the community and we spend countless hours and raise tens of thousands of dollars annually to give back right here in the Town of Aurora," he said. "It is a wonderful feeling to be recognized for contributing to the

community because it does mean so much to us. I would like to thank the Chamber and all the people who voted for us and nominated us. It really does mean a lot and we will continue to be flag-bearers for the community to promote Aurora to help everyone that we can.?

Newer businesses also had their moment in the spotlight, with Drummer's Hangout taking home the New Business award, having been nominated alongside Aurora Borealis Orthodontics and the family-run Mexican restaurant Dos Mariachis.

?We opened our doors on Father's Day 2015 and haven't looked back since,? said Drummers' Hangout's Murat Baslamisli. ?We are a little bit different from other music stores I know where people come here from long distances and spend sometimes two or three hours here hanging out and watching drum videos, other drummers are in here all the time. There is no sales pressure. If they buy something, great. If they don't, it's still great. We talk about drums, have a drink and just have a great time. This is truly a hangout. We take drums very seriously, but we don't take ourselves very seriously.?

Winning an award like this, he said, is not something people in his profession experience every day because drumming is ?a very niche thing, really.?

?A music market overall is a niche thing and within that a drumming market is one per cent, let's say. I'm truly humbled and honoured to be here and recognized for this. Two and a half years of really hard ? I don't have to explain how the life of an entrepreneur goes. Most of you know, but recognition like this definitely helps. It motivates people to work harder and I would like to thank the Chamber for this recognition. It is huge and unexpected.?

Another business receiving a good shot in the arm through the awards was Ginger's Cupcakes & Desserts, which took home the Young Entrepreneur Award in a field that also included BioPed Footcare and K+A Concierge.

The award was accepted by owners Anna Herd and Amanda Spiteri who were excited by the opportunity.

?Thank you so much to our fellow nominees and the Aurora Chamber,? said Ms. Herd. ?Thanks for welcoming us to Aurora.?

One Aurora-based business has been recently welcomed into another community as Honsberger Physio expanded operations into North York. The clinic took home the 2018 Innovation Award over fellow nominees STEM Minds and Ten Twonies Financial Literacy for Kids. The award was accepted by Robyn Honsberger, Business Development and Operations Manager for the multigenerational family-run business.

?First of all, congratulations to the other two nominees. Watching those two videos and seeing what you guys do every single day is extremely inspiring and it makes what we do every single day seem a little bit less cool, even though I think it is amazing,? she said.

?I can't believe I am up here tonight. I thought it was really an amazing, incredible nomination and I am here on behalf of a team of 29 people and my family. We have been in business now for 31 years now and we're just getting started. We just opened up a clinic in North York, so we have 10 facilities across York Region and the GTA. I can't thank the Aurora Chamber of Commerce?for how much you have done for our business.?