

Late mayor leaves legacy to help foster tomorrow's leaders

By Brock Weir

John West grew up in meagre beginnings in England, before moving to Canada in the 1960s. Growing up with comparatively little, West devoted himself to his new community before being elected by his neighbours as Councillor and eventually mayor.

Despite his death nearly a year-and-a-half ago after a long period of ill health, he is set to continue to continue his services to Aurora this week with the creation of a new leadership scholarship at Town Hall.



Mayor John West

In his will, Mr. West left nearly \$200,000 to various community programs and services, including \$50,000 to Southlake Regional Health Centre, \$40,000 to the Salvation Army, and \$25,000 apiece to the Aurora Historical Society and Big Brothers Big Sisters of York, a \$30,000 bequest was made to the Town of Aurora for the creation of a scholarship fund to help recognize the achievements of young Aurora residents who aim to give back to the world around them.

Dubbed 'The John West Memorial 'Leaders of Tomorrow' Scholarship', the program is set for approval at the Committee level this week before receiving formal Council approval next Tuesday. In his report, Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation, says \$1,000 will be allocated each year to two local students - one male and one female - to help pay for the first year of their post-secondary education.

The intent is to reward students who have had an impact in their community in areas such as education, health, fundraising, and volunteerism, and applicants for the award will be evaluated on their leadership qualities, involvement in community service, 'acting as an inspirational role model' for the community, a commitment towards others, and contributing 'while living with a physical or psychological limitation.'

Should the program get the thumbs-up from Council, the inaugural recipients could be selected as early as this spring.

For resident Graham Wride, a long-time friend and executor of Mr. West, this is his legacy in action.

'He came from somewhat humble beginnings and didn't have a very high formal education and he wanted to leave some money to encourage the youth to follow in a leadership role, whether that be in politics, the working world, or what have you,' says Mr. Wride. 'He just wanted to make this bequest that is open to a resident of Aurora who is currently in school and going onto some sort of higher education, whether it be in university, college, or an apprenticeship, and not necessarily like most awards that are handed out to the A students.'

Mr. West defined 'leadership' as 'being aware of the common person,' adds Mr. Wride.

'He never felt like he was above anybody and would listen to anybody at any time and try to weigh people's ideas, and pros and cons. I think a lot of times now, politicians are lawyers and things like that, so he wanted to encourage the ordinary person. He

wanted to encourage youngsters to get into a leadership role at the grassroots.

?Hopefully it will encourage some of the younger people to think about getting into politics and more interested in the word. There is so much cynicism now amongst the general populace, but particularly towards the young people, to try and encourage them to get involved with it and be heard from that point of view. He felt so deeply for Aurora, his adopted home.?

John West died on December 28, 2013. He was predeceased by his partner, Fran, and survived by her children and their families.