

## Leading Women awards salute inroads into science and technology



**By Brock Weir**

A healthy mind, coupled with a healthy body can lead to limitless potential ? but getting on the right track is very often a team effort.

Earlier this month, to mark International Women's Day, Newmarket-Aurora MPP Chris Ballard saluted 23 area women in the fourth annual Leading Women / Leading Girls awards.

This year's awards, hosted at Newmarket's Old Town Hall, was an opportunity to pay tribute to female community builders of all ages, but it was also a time to honour those women who are laying foundations for the female leaders of tomorrow.

?We know that gender inequality persists worldwide and, because of that, women and girls are deprived of their very basic rights and opportunities in too many places,? said Mr. Ballard. ?[There is no doubt] that the healthy mind and body of an educated girl, with equal access to opportunities, grow into strong, smart women.?

This week, The Auroran shares the citations of the final twelve honoured recipients.

### ASHLEY SZAKAL

Ashley is an outstanding member of Girls Inc., an organization focused around ?Inspiring All Girls to Be Strong, Smart and Bold.? Ashley joined Girls Inc. to make a difference for girls and to support girls choosing to stay in school and setting their career goals. Ashley has inspired many young women to get involved in the STEM sector through her volunteer work with FIRST Robotics. She has volunteered countless hours supporting and giving speeches for FIRST Robotics. Ashley is a true champion for girls and she inspires those around her to reach their full potential.

### SARID LAYTON

Sarid is known to her friends and coworkers as a mentor. She is dedicated to making a difference whenever she is able ? in all aspects of her life. She has given innumerable hours to serving the community. She has served with various organizations such as Gather North, Inn from the Cold, Dog Tales, York Pride Festival, Breast Cancer Society of Ontario and many more. Sarid is passionate about supporting those around her and is enthusiastic about encouraging others to do the same.

### BESSIE SCHINAS-VLASSIS

Bessie is one of the two founders of the Bully Free Community Alliance and is a phenomenal advocate for children and adolescent mental health. She volunteers regularly with Southlake on the Mental Health Patient and Family Committee. She gives her time to promote anti-bullying initiatives/groups and to educate parents on how to navigate the world of bullying and mental health. Bessie strives to bring her passion, expertise and experience to help build and sustain positive communities.

### HEATHER BULL-SENAY

Heather is a proud and dedicated member of Girls Inc of York Region and is a prominent member of the York Regional Police

department. Heather believes in empowering girls in an equitable society and is a true champion for girls. She has given countless hours supporting women's rights and promoting women in leadership. Heather is part of the Women in Leadership division of the York Regional Police Internal Support Network.

#### KAREN RICHARDS

Karen shows outstanding devotion and leadership in all she does. She believes passionately in promoting equality and diversity for all. Karen is an active volunteer within her community and the York Regional Police Department. She has spent many hours working with young children at the Community Safety Village, with the Special Olympics in 2013, and at cultural events that connect the police with their citizens. Karen is also president of the Community Living Central York Board of Directors.

#### JANIS BELL

Janis is a woman of extreme passion and caring for those around her and within her community. She does extraordinary work for people by counselling them and volunteering with various organizations. Janis is an active member of the Newmarket Rotary and University Women's group. Janis inspires others to read and foster their imagination and knowledge.

#### TOYIN ADEKUSIBE

Toyin is a remarkable leader and volunteer, not just in York Region but across the GTA. She consciously seeks to maintain a heart of service; humbly giving back to the community. She volunteers regularly with the Toronto Police and with her local church. She has been awarded an Education of Excellence by the Yoruba Community of Canada and the leadership recognition by Toronto police. Toyin has dedicated herself to serving others and helps to ensure that the next generation of young girls, women and youths are equipped to be the leaders of tomorrow.

#### ARIANNA SKOLOUDIJK

Arianna is a young ambitious girl, who is discreetly involved within her school community. She volunteers frequently within her local community and last summer spent 200+ hours with Sunrise Senior Living in Aurora. She also commits much of her time to helping the youth of the YMCA in Newmarket. She is also a member of the francophone community in Aurora/Newmarket. Arianna demonstrates her leadership abilities and shows that when ideas come to life, dreams can come true.

#### TRACEE CHAMBERS

Tracee is an outstanding person with a huge heart. Her support of many different organizations, including Inn From the Cold and Dragonfly Wellness has made an enormous difference to those in need. Tracee is a recipient of the Canada 150 Volunteer Award for her amazing contributions to helping those in need. She is on the board of Coldest Night of the Year. Tracee devotes her time to helping the community in any way she can.

#### MAYA BISHOP

Maya is an outstanding student and leader within her school and local community. She has been involved with school clubs, such as Equity Club, Peer Mentors, Empowering Students Partnership (ESP), and several more. Maya was part of the creation and coordination of the Why Code Aurora event, which encourages girls to consider careers in STEM. She is currently president of the ESP and an executive of the Music Council. Maya was just accepted to the University of Waterloo.

#### AMANDA BISHOP

Amanda is very passionate about the computer sciences sector and has organized multiple events in her school and around the community to help educate and engage girls in computing careers. Amanda became involved in Why Code Aurora after she realized that there are issues of gender disparity that young women were not aware of careers that are available in STEM fields. She has helped promote the male ?dominated area to her female peers. She has shown exceptional leadership and initiative in putting these events together.

#### ELISABETH HEMPEN

Elisabeth is a role model and mentor for many women and girls around Newmarket. She has done amazing work with the Bereaved Families of York Region organization and devotes her time each year to their candlelight vigil. Elisabeth has also worked with the

Newmarket Business Improvement Area. Elisabeth is constantly praised by her peers for her selfless giving and care for others