

Mary Georgopoulos named Citizen of the Year



By Brock Weir

As a restaurateur, Mary Georgopoulos served up more than just food for hungry Aurorans.

She let worthy community causes have the run of Jonathan's Restaurant, the popular former eatery founded by her parents, to shine a light on their work.

She also quietly opened the doors of the restaurant each Christmas Day to help give, in conjunction with Welcome Table, countless local families in need, a proper holiday meal.

Now, Aurorans will have a whole year to say thanks to Ms. Georgopoulos as Aurora's 2016 Citizen of the Year.

Ms. Georgopoulos was recognized with the honour by Mayor Geoff Dawe on Monday night at the Town's annual Community Recognition Awards.

Her honour was greeted enthusiastically the crowds who turned out for the Town Hall ceremony, including Magna's Steve Hinder, one of the numerous Aurora residents who nominated Ms. Georgopoulos for the honour.

"Mary is an unsung hero," said Mr. Hinder. "She shies away from the spotlight. People like Mary are reluctant heroes and by sharing their stories it helps to inspire others to get involved and become engaged in the community, which is what Aurora was built on. Today, it continues to be such a significant way in which to build community. As we continue to grow, it is probably even more important than it has been in the years gone by."

From its early days, giving back to the community was a way Jonathan's immediately stand out from the crowd, beyond their traditional Greek and Canadian fare. Their first foray into fundraising came with "It's All Greek to Me", a fundraiser organized by Ms. Georgopoulos for the Heart & Stroke Foundation of Canada after her father became ill.

From there, they branched out into events to support organizations such as the AIDS Committee of York Region, Big Brothers Big Sisters of York, and Welcome Table.

"We realised that if you take care of your own community, it might be beneficial for everyone," Mary told The Auroran in 2014, when she hung up her apron at Jonathan's after 25 years. "I think because Aurora is such an affluent Town, people don't realise poverty exists in our community, or there are people who just need something over financial and emotional times, because it is not just about finances."

Mr. Hinder first met Mary when Jonathan's was being run by her parents. As time went on, he said he saw Mary become more and more engaged both in the business and the community.

?The more engaged she got, the more the doors became open at Jonathan's to host any community cause she saw worthy,? said Mr. Hinder. ?The work has followed her to [Aw, Shucks! where she recently came following a year or so in semi-retirement] and she is really great at rallying people to get out and support something that has been brought to her attention in terms of a community need. Because she does it straight from the heart, she gets a lot of support from folks who know that it is only because she wants to help.

?She has such a compassionate spirit and she is a very genuine individual. It is totally what drives her, the need itself, and because she is compassionate, genuine, and people want to help Mary because they know if it is something she is getting involved in then there is a real need. She doesn't care who, when, how or why. Her door is wide open. She doesn't pick specific causes or needs. It is the need that attracts her.?