

Nearly 900 community service hours racked up quickly for Aurora's Alex Auger



By Brock Weir

As a long-time and enthusiastic volunteer within his school community, and indeed the wider community, Alex Auger had a sense he might be racking up some pretty serious volunteer hours.

But even his jaw nearly hit the floor when the numbers were crunched at over 870.

"It took me completely by surprise," he says. "I knew I was doing a lot, and I knew I had a higher than average amount, but I never thought after three or four years I would have over 870 community service hours!"

These 870 hours helped secure a \$500 grant through the Give Back Awards, a program founded by then-MP Belinda Stronach in 2004. He received his award, along with others from York Region, at a ceremony held this spring at Magna Headquarters on Wellington Street East.

Alex, who was then a Grade 12 student at St. Andrew's College (SAC), got his first flavour of community service there in Grade 9. With his mother a member of the SAC faculty, he began getting involved on the technical side of his school's dramatic productions, often handling the lighting design. It was a skill he also honed doing the lighting for his sister's gymnastics team.

From there, he started getting involved with SAC's Outreach Committee, of which he is now president.

"Our job is to reach out to the local community as well as the international community," he explains. "Every year, we help fundraise for the York Region Children's Aid Society through the Holiday Heroes program, where the whole student body buys gifts for students or families at Christmastime who can't afford them.

"Internationally, we raise money for different international programs and every year is a new one. In my year, we went to Madagascar to build a school there and worked locally to help out in any way we could."

Madagascar was chosen, he said, in an effort to work in countries that have experienced recent economic challenges. A former colonial outpost, it's trying to find its footing as an independent nation, both politically and economically.

In preparing for their journey, Alex spoke to students who in previous years travelled to Tanzania to carry out similar work. He got a good handle on what they might need, what other students had forgot, and dove into some research to find out what they could expect.

?I found it very interesting because there are a lot of contrasts, not only with the language barrier, but just the way they act,? says Alex. ?One thing I found shocking is they don't have hugging in their culture. There is no word for it. And they have no experience of it. Among our group of guys, the work strengthened our relationships with each other and showed us how lucky we are in Canada.?

As president of the outreach committee, he has wanted to continue their international work, as well as put his own personal spin on their mandate. One of his pet projects has been increasing student involvement in the 30 Hour Famine, which highlights a different effort each year.

He has made sure it is more than just a simple fast, but as a way to build camaraderie. To stave off hunger pangs, the group has taken trips down to Dave and Busters Sports Bar to while away the hours in the arcade section, steering very clear of any temptations that might be found on the restaurant side of the operations.

As he prepared for graduation this year, one of his teachers recommended he apply for the Give Back Award. It is nice recognition of the work people throughout York Region have put into community service and he wanted to secure one of the grants to inspire others.

?I know a lot of people know me as a kid who has over 800 community service hours, and they try and beat me in hours and all that good stuff, but me applying for the Give Back Awards, I hope to inspire other students in future years to have their goals,? he says. ?Don't think of it in how many hours you can get. Think about what you can accomplish. When I set forward doing my community service, I didn't think how many hours I could get in X amount of time. It was just seeing how many things I can do and just take it from there.

?Start off with what you enjoy and what you have fun with, and try some new stuff with your friends and buddies. If you are having fun, you are going to be helping other people and it is a lot better than doing something that you don't want to do.?