

Outstanding students recognized with 'Leaders of Tomorrow' scholarships



Students who have tirelessly given back to their school and wider communities were honoured last week in Council Chambers with the John West Memorial 'Leaders of Tomorrow' Scholarships.

This year's honourees are Rizwan Kazi, who recently graduated from Aurora High School, and St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School's Anthea Peta-Dragos, who recently completed her second and final year as a student trustee for the York Catholic District School Board.

The John West Memorial 'Leaders of Tomorrow' Scholarship was established by the Town of Aurora following a financial bequest from late Aurora mayor John West. It's awarded to two students each year who have demonstrated leadership over their time in school and who are entering their first year as full-time students at either university or college.

Kazi, who was recognized at the podium by Julie Stephenson, Youth & Community Development Coordinator for the Town of Aurora, was hailed for maintaining his 'high academic average' while balancing his school work with sports and community building.

'While balancing his studies and academic pursuits, Rizwan volunteered for over 800 hours of community service. In the fall, Rizwan will be attending Toronto Metropolitan University to begin his studies in civil engineering,' said Stephenson.

'Rizwan's contributions have made a distinct and positive impact on the Aurora community through numerous volunteering initiatives with local elementary schools, Play Forever, the Aurora Public Library, Canada Beyond the Blue, and the Newmarket Islamic Centre. Most notably, Rizwan led the creation of a STEM-based peer tutoring program with Play Forever with the York Region District School Board. Of his numerous community service hours, approximately 200 hours have been specifically dedicated to providing free tutoring to families facing financial barriers. His community-minded leadership has been inspirational to his peers, providing access to educational supports and encouragement. Rizwan has a passion for helping others and giving back to the community, especially those who are new to our communities or facing barriers. His dedication to and engagement with local communities and the organizations who serve them clearly demonstrate his commitment to others.'

Peta-Dragos was also hailed for her academic achievements and efforts to make Aurora and York Region a better place to live. Preparing to attend the University of Western Ontario this fall to pursue a degree in Life Sciences, she is, said Stephenson, 'a

positive presence in the community.?

?[She has] taken on various leadership positions on her Student Council, Mental Health Council, and most notably as a two-year Student Trustee for the York Catholic District School Board. Contributing almost 200 hours of community service, Anthea has made an impact on organizations such as Sending Sunshine, the Aurora Public Library, Plan International Canada, and the Town of Aurora programs. Notably during her tenure as Student Trustee, Anthea was part of an initiative to provide free menstrual products to all students in York Region Catholic elementary and secondary schools. Anthea has demonstrated outstanding leadership and compassion, acting as a role model for her peers and leading change in her school community. Her dedication to giving back and positively impacting others in the community and her extensive contributions have made Aurora a better place for residents to enjoy.?

Following a photo op in the centre of Council Chambers, these warm words were echoed by lawmakers present for the tribute.

?I want to congratulate both the recipients,? said Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese. ?It's incredible to see all the work you have done in the community. Communities like ours thrive on young people donating their time and volunteering in a lot of meaningful ways, so I want to thank them for all the work they have done in the community over the last year and, in some cases, four years.?

Participating in the meeting remotely, Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland expressed disappointment she wasn't able to hear the round of applause from people in Council Chambers, which was muted on the livestream, but nonetheless joined in.

?Congratulations to both of you on this very important award,? she said. ?I can feel and sense the emotion.?

Added Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner: ?This is a proud moment I am very glad to share with you. I wish you lots of success in whatever you decide to do in the future.?

Next to speak was Ward 6 Councillor Harold Kim, who hailed the duo as, ?excellent examples of today's youth being tomorrow's leaders.?

?I can't say how much we're all very proud of you both, and your parents should be very proud ? I am sure they are,? he said.

Wrapping up, was Mayor Tom Mrakas who echoed Councillor Kim's comments on pride.

?We're extremely proud of both of you. All the work you have done in your community is tremendous and it speaks volumes about our youth in our community not only now but for the future. I think that all of us are going to be excited to watch you represent Aurora not only at your universities but as you continue to go through not only your education but in your futures.

?We know you're going to do Aurora proud, so congratulations and all the best!?

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