

Pickering College honours Changemakers and alumni in inaugural event



Pickering College, the Newmarket-based independent school, aims to give students the resources to make an impact on stages large and small ? and, last month, the school community came together to recognize remarkable alumni and groups in the community who are working towards those same goals.

The inaugural Alumni Keystone and Agent of Change Community Awards were presented May 24 at their Bayview Avenue campus and among those honoured were the Aurora-based York Region Food Network (YRFN).

The YRFN received the inaugural Agent of Change ? Community, Organization award alongside Blue Door Shelters.

?York Region Food Network is a small organization with a huge impact in York Region, where approximately 25,000 households experience food insecurity,? said Joshua Armstrong, Pickering's Director of Teaching and Learning. ?The programs include community gardens, food classes to develop skills and build community, a drop-in breakfast, and the Good Food Box.?

Accepting the award was YRFN Executive Director Kate Greavette who said, due partially to the pandemic, the figure of 25,000 households was sadly outdated.

?The situation has gotten so much worse in York Region,? said Greavette, adding they serve approximately 15,000 York Region residents each year. ?Rather than one in eleven households facing food insecurity, which was the experience in 2016, as of 2020 one in seven households are living with food insecurity?across York Region. ?That stat is from 2020 and I can tell you the situation has gotten much worse over the last three years. Our estimation is about 20 per cent of our population is living with food insecurity right now. For us as an organization who are just working tirelessly in the community just trying to do what we can to support, [and] right now also working towards policy changes and systems change. We really appreciate being recognized and just to know that there are so many people who are like-minded, everyone wants to see healthier, better communities, it just gives us the inspiration we need to keep going each day and make this change.?

Presenting the same award to Blue Door Shelters, Julia Hunt, PC's Director of Strategic Innovation and Partnerships, hailed the organization for its ?long history of providing dignified housing support to vulnerable people in York Region.?

Blue Door's Chief Operating Officer Emmy Kelly said it was heartening to learn at the ceremony of other leaders and groups

creating ?positive change.?

?The impact is so, so needed in the community,? said Kelly. ?Blue Door supports those experiencing or at risk of homelessness and we do that by focusing on the strategic pillars of housing, health and employment for those we serve. We are not heroes, we are your everyday people. We have an incredible team doing what we can to support heroes on their own journey. We really believe that every individual we serve is the hero of their story. A young, single mom who our team worked with and now is gainfully employed in a career in the trades, able to provide for her young child. A young man who came to us from the justice system, turned away from seven employment opportunities, only to come into our construct program where the team worked to help remove barriers to access to employment and he is now gainfully employed as a manager and is studying for his bachelor's degree. The stories go on and on and they are made possible by the incredible work of our team, but also a community that cares, so we're just so grateful tonight to be honoured and highlighted in this way; and we're so grateful for the partnerships of so many in this room who make the work possible.?

According to Head of School Dr. Cinde Lock, the recent ceremony, which she described as the ?brainchild? of Julia Hunt, aligns with the mission of the school, ?which is to instill in each individual the ability and responsibility to make the world greater, better and more beautiful than they discovered it.?

?This phrase comes from the Athenian Youth Oath of about 2,000 years ago, which is part of our heritage at the school,? she said. ?As you are all here tonight because each of you in your own way live and breathe the mission of our school in your daily lives, whether you know it or not. Indeed, looking around this room it is clear that we have a shared purpose to make the world around us better.?

And, in some cases, the impact is being felt out of this world as well.

The inaugural Alumni Keystone Award was created to ?recognize outstanding contributions our young alumni make through their professional, academic or volunteer achievements.?

?The award celebrates alumni who are under 35 yet already have an impressive resume of meaningful impact and action Alumni who are not only making a difference today but are helping shape a better tomorrow,? said Lock, announcing the very first winner to be Nico Macias of the Class of 2014, who is now working as an engineer at SpaceX.

?He has gone on to build an incredible career, currently working as a vehicle structures engineers with SpaceX,? she continued. ?His impactful work at SpaceX is focused on enhancing the launch rate and reliability of the Falcon vehicle, enabling unprecedented access to space. Notably he has contributed to giving North America an independent launch vehicle for astronauts, providing cost-effective satellite missions and enabling the first portion of the Starlink Constellation to be placed into orbit, which is revolutionizing internet connectivity worldwide. It is a vital tool for disaster relief, demonstrated by its impactful use in Ukraine, Puerto Rico, Germany and other nations already. We're so proud of everything you have accomplished thus far and the impact you are making across the world.?

Accepting the award virtually, Macias said he was ?humbled and honoured? to be recognized by his former school.

?I really think it is wonderful that the school is now reaching out to recognize young alumni and their accomplishments because I think one of the more impactful things? was when we would bring younger professionals into more meetings and the like? and see what they are working on,? he said. ?It really is grounding for a young [student] to see what is possible after high school. It contextualizes why we're going to school, why we're participating in leadership programs and all of those things. I really appreciate that you're making this effort to highlight the good work the Pickering community is doing.?

NEXT WEEK: Pickering College honours individuals with the Agent of Change awards.

By Brock Weir
Editor
Local Journalism Initiative Reporter