

Rick Hansen dedicates namesake school

By Brock Weir

Students experienced an 'out of this world' school day on Thursday as Rick Hansen came to open his namesake school on Mavrinac Boulevard.

It was no ordinary school opening, however. Canada's Man in Motion brought with him a rather long-distance message from Commander Chris Hadfield, the Canadian astronaut currently overseeing the International Space Station.

Over 300 students filled the school gym eagerly anticipating words from Mr. Hansen, who has inspired generations of Canadians through his original Man in Motion tour around the world in his wheelchair and the continuing efforts of his foundation to find a cure for spinal cord injuries and increase accessibility in communities around the world.

He told students, who participated in the ceremony dressed as some of their favourite people who had made a difference in the world they lived in - from Abraham Lincoln to Mother Theresa - that the naming of the school was an honour not just for him but the people that have made a difference in his own world.

'The opening of the Rick Hansen Public School in Aurora is such an honour for me personally as I continue my journey to encourage young people that there are no boundaries to their potential and to inspire them to make a difference in their communities,' said Mr. Hansen. 'It has always been very important to me to inspire youth to make a difference in their communities and I am very appreciative that students, teachers, and staff at the Rick Hansen Public School are committed to our shared values of determination, courage, strength, inspiration, and hope.'

It was these values that Commander Hadfield drove home in his message for students. Looking out of the space station onto the surface of the earth, he said he was inspired by the possibilities on the surface below.

'[Rick Hansen] wanted to make the world more accessible but more importantly he wanted to show the potential of people with disabilities,' said Commander Hadfield. 'His incredible journey, which took two years, two months, and two days, showed everybody that anything is possible. He challenged people to also make a difference.'

'Maybe more importantly Rick Hansen hasn't stopped since. He is a real difference maker and recently he celebrated the 25th anniversary of that world tour. He did it by recognizing his fellow difference makers of all ages and across the world, people who make a difference in their own way to make the world a better place.'

Commander Hadfield said he was honoured to be chosen as a difference maker himself and recalled the honour he had to participate in the medal relay to mark the 25th anniversary of the Man in Motion Tour, which also wound its way through Aurora, culminating in a celebration at Town Hall in December of 2011. That being said, despite their achievements, he said there is much more work to be done.

'Maybe someone with a disability will be able to join us here and fly in space,' said Commander Hadfield 'Now it is your turn to become a difference maker. You can make changes in your own community and you can make a difference in the world.'