

Saberi's legacy sparks wave of community giving, kindness



The sudden passing last week of local restaurant owner Sam Saberi, a man known for his passion for supporting the community he called home, sparked waves of grief, gratitude, and a commitment to further his legacy of giving.

Saberi, owner of Tina's Grill, whose commitment to Aurora was recognized in 2022 when he was named the Town's Citizen of the Year, died April 21 at the age of 41.

In the days following the announcement of his passing, community members recalled the many ways he supported his neighbours, whether through his restaurant or in his day-to-day life.

His kindness was remembered by residents who pledged to perform random acts of kindness in his memory, and by fellow business owners who doubled down on their ways of giving in honour of his leadership, culminating in a vigil Friday night outside Tina's Grill which attracted hundreds.

Saberi will be honoured with a Celebration of Life this Saturday, May 2, at the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex from 3 - 6 p.m.

"Throughout his life, Sam was known for his kindness and generosity," said his family. "He had an innate ability to make everyone feel welcome and valued, qualities that shone brightly in his role as the heart and soul of Tina's Grill. Sam's infectious smile made him not only the face of the restaurant but also a beloved figure in the community he served.

"A true sports enthusiast, Sam loved hockey, baseball, soccer, and football. His spirited enthusiasm for these games brought people together, fostering friendships, and creating memories that will last a lifetime.

"As we mourn his loss, we take comfort in the impact he had on so many lives. Sam touched the hearts of everyone he met. His legacy of kindness and community will continue to inspire all who knew him."

Saberi is survived by his parents Hossein and Azar, his sister Tina, brother-in-law Branko, niece Maya, and nephew Mason.

When Saberi was named Citizen of the Year, he was hailed for his "unwavering" commitment to Aurora, both in serving up a delicious menu, but in turning his restaurant over as a drop-off location for toy donations during the holiday season, stepping up to raise funds for countless causes, and even fostering an initiative inviting patrons to pay it forward and pre-pay for meals which could then be claimed by community members in need.

"I am deeply saddened to hear about the sudden passing of Sam Saberi, an Aurora resident, business owner and community-builder

who touched so many lives and made enormous contributions to our Town," said Mayor Tom Mrakas in a statement. "To Sam's family, friends and colleagues, I am so sorry for your loss. The truth is that this is a loss for our entire community. Sam was simply an incredible human being. Many know him as the co-owner of Tina's Grill, where every meal included his ear-to-ear smile and warm conversation. But he was so much more than a business-owner. His passion was to give back and help those around him. And did he ever, with contributions so big and so wide-ranging.

On the last Wednesday of every month, he provided free meals to five families in need. He supported a local family after they lost their home to a fire, and used his business as a drop-off location for Christmas toy donations after toys were stolen from our local fire station. He collected donations for Ukraine, shared his personal journey of contracting COVID-19 to inspire others to get vaccinated, and selflessly helped a driver who suffered a medical condition and lost control of his vehicle. At Thanksgiving and Christmas, he donated dozens of turkeys to those who couldn't afford them, and each year, he chose one struggling family and provided them with up to \$2,000 in groceries. This is just a snippet of how much he did.

More than anything else, Sam's generosity was contagious, inspiring other business owners and community members to follow his lead, making Aurora a more caring and compassionate place. One of the true honours I've had as Mayor was presenting Sam with the 2022 Citizen of the Year Award, a testament to the impact he made in our community. Aurora has lost someone incredibly special. And along with so many community members, I will be forever grateful for the lives he changed and how he simply made Aurora better. There is no doubt Sam's legacy will be felt in our Town for so many years to come.

On behalf of the local business community, the Aurora Chamber of Commerce also paid tribute to Saberi's contributions to the Town and its residents, describing him as an "unwavering community champion."

As co-owner of Tina's Grill, Sam built more than a successful local business; he created a welcoming space where community members felt at home," said Alison Mumford, Executive Director of the Aurora Chamber of Commerce. "Known for his kindness, generosity, and genuine care for others, Sam exemplified what it means to lead with heart and integrity.

Sam's dedication to both his business and the community was widely recognized. In 2021, he was honoured with a Business Excellence Award for Business Resilience during COVID, recognizing his perseverance and commitment during one of the most challenging periods for local businesses. In 2022, he was named Citizen of the Year by the Town of Aurora, a reflection of the profound impact he made through his generosity, leadership, and community spirit.

Sam was always welcoming, kind, and demonstrated true passion and resilience as a business owner. His presence, support, and unwavering loyalty to the community will be deeply missed."

In 2023, Saberi was one of the local leaders who laced up to help send children living with physical challenges to summer camp as part of Dancing with the Easter Seals Stars Aurora-Newmarket. That year, their combined efforts raised more than \$125,000 for the cause.

From the moment I met you, I knew you were someone truly special," said Anastasia Trutneva, co-owner of Aurora's Artistica Dance Studios, his partner in the Dancing with the Stars Event. "You had no idea what you were stepping into when you signed up for Easter Seals Kids, and I feel so grateful to have had the privilege of being your partner. Even though you were completely outside your comfort zone, you never lost sight of why you were doing it. It was always for the kids. And when it came time to perform, you gave it everything. You danced so beautifully, and I remember feeling incredibly proud of you in that moment. It's a memory I will always carry with me.

From there, you became like family to us. The visits to Tina's Grill, seeing your mom and dad, reminiscing about that night. It all meant so much. You were truly an angel on earth. The way you showed up for others, your constant support for your community, and your generosity were undeniable. You lived life with passion, always giving more, always doing more. You leave behind a powerful legacy. One of kindness, strength, and service.

?You will be deeply missed ? and when we meet again, please save me a dance.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter