

Thomson honored by Sport Aurora as Volunteer of the Year at 19th Annual Recognition Event



Sport Aurora President Ron Weese welcomed more than 100 attendees to its annual Volunteer Recognition Event, our longest-running event which has grown from recognizing the volunteers of seven organizations to today's event that recognizes the contributions made to seventeen organizations.

Weese noted that across this Town, volunteer spirit is the backbone of the community.

In the comfy confines of Wicked Eats on Sunday morning, the long-time Sport Aurora executive and current Ward 1 Councillor reminded the honorees how valuable volunteers are.

Without volunteers, municipal sport would not exist. Forty-two local sports organizations are completely dependent on volunteers. Over 2,500 people volunteer to make sport happen in Aurora. 70% of the programs could not run without volunteers. Those 2,500 volunteers contribute 85,000 hours per year. If you had to pay for those services, it would cost \$2.125M. That's just in the sports organizations in Town. We recognize all volunteers as public assets.

Weese welcomed Volunteer Recognition Chair and Emcee Stephen Forsey to the stage and the dapper host decked out in his timeless tuxedo made light of his dashing appearance: I turned down an opportunity to play James Bond to make this event today.

The long-time host of the feel-good event mentioned that many in the room were voluntold which started their careers as volunteers and look at you now!

The use of voluntold elicited laughter and nodding from the engaged attendees who soaked in the ambience of Rob Stewart's restaurant as the aroma of appetizers wafted through the room.

The elegant Forsey thanked prime sponsor E360, The Auroran newspaper for its coverage most recently on our Breakfast of Champions event and we want to thank Rob Stewart and the Wicked Eats staff for hosting us today.

MPP Dawn Gallagher-Murphy charmed the group, maintaining that volunteers contributed mightily to the social fabric of the community. The MPP for Aurora-Newmarket observed that volunteers are everywhere and offered a Biblical allusion: It is so much better to give than to receive. We must give back to our community, our children, their friends, so that these kids give back to their community, too. That to me is what it's all about.

Forsey segued skillfully and noted that the kids to which Gallagher-Murphy referred are sports participants that range from 3 to 80.

The Emcee kept the train running on time and invited Mayor Tom Mrakas to the stage.

Mayor Mrakas nodded his appreciation to "the best-dressed man in the room" Stephen Forsey and praised the volunteer spirit in Aurora as "one of the strongest in the province."

"It's what sets our community apart. The real strength of our sports community is you—the volunteers. Our leagues just don't exist—they thrive. You've created a space for athletes to grow—to develop friendships and skills. On behalf of the Town of Aurora, thank you for the service and the passion you bring. Congratulations to every one being honored today."

After the Mayor's address, Weese presented the Sport Aurora President's Award to Aurora Junior A Tigers Governor and long-time Emcee of Sport Aurora's Breakfast of Champions Jim Thomson.

The former NHLer, Aurora Sports Hall of Fame inductee, and tireless contributor to the social fabric of the Town expressed his comfort with the festivities at Wicked Eats: "This is a family event."

Thomson spoke with fondness about volunteering with his sons and his Aurora Tigers players at community events and praised the hard work demonstrated by "former Mayor Geoff Dawe and current Mayor Tom Mrakas who've appeared at so many sports and charity events with me and do so much work behind the scene to support local sports. I'm honored to be with all the volunteers being recognized today."

After Thomson received the prestigious award to much appreciative applause and posed for a family photo, the wonderfully-efficient Forsey took attendees through a whirlwind tour of volunteers who have made outstanding contributions to the community.

Kevin Daly (York Oldtimers Hockey League), Natasha Tassone (Central York Girls Hockey Association), Rob Sharko (Aurora Barbarians Rugby Football Club), Gordon Weir (Aurora Lawn Bowling Club), Andy Mitchell and Heather Papa (Special Olympics-Aurora), Joanne Reiter-Rey (Aurora Minor Hockey Association), Steve Woods (Aurora Junior A Tigers), Fernanda Carrillo (York Artistic Swimming), Gary Armstrong (Storm Volleyball), Amina Hashgari (Aurora Skating Club), Jessie-Lynn Boadway (Toronto and North York Pony Club), and Dan Hale (Aurora Diggers Girls Softball Association) were each lauded for their efforts by an organizational colleague and the honorees delivered concise speeches that were appreciated by the dozens in attendance.

Also recognized but unable to attend the ceremony were Anne Bailey-Neuendorf of the York Region Football Association, Lorri McKay of the Team Ontario Astros, and the Aurora Soccer Club's quartet of honored volunteers: Hamed Fallahnia, Joe Artega, Brian Casey, and John Aird.

By Jim Stewart Local Journalism Initiative Reporter