

UPDATED: Josie Kearney named 2018 Citizen of the Year



By Brock Weir

Josie Kearney has been named Aurora's 2018 Citizen of the Year

The Grade 12 student at Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School received Aurora's highest honour at Monday night's Community Recognition Awards ceremony held at Town Hall.

Ms. Kearney, who is the youngest person to receive the award since its inception nearly 50 years ago, was recognized for her tireless work not only within the Williams community, but in the world around her.

"Her list of accomplishments is truly inspiring," said Mayor Geoff Dawe who did the honours, recognizing the honouree for her kindness, positive spirit and commitment to make a difference.

A leading Peer Mentor within her school, Ms. Kearney was lauded for the difference she makes in the lives of her fellow students as soon as they walk through their Dunning Avenue doors.

"As a mentor to her peers, she helps ensure that Grade 9 students successfully transition to high school," said Mayor Dawe. "She encourages fellow members of the Peer Mentoring group to think carefully about the impact they will have locally and globally. She consistently goes above and beyond with everything she does."

One such initiative is a pre-Christmas social she hosted at her home for members of the Peer Mentoring group. Each member was encouraged to bring a donation for a family in need and, as a result, she was able to purchase much-needed grocery cards for the selected family.

Her efforts to raise both money and awareness for the Terry Fox Foundation were also highlighted, crediting her energy and enthusiasm for the cause helping to raise over \$6,000 for the Terry Fox Foundation.

Perhaps the Aurora community at large is most familiar with her dedication to Something for Sarah, Williams' annual cheek swabbing event which collects samples from students and teachers for the National Bone Marrow registry.

"As a result of her efforts more than 200 names have been added to the bone marrow registry, each hopeful they may be able to save a life one day," said Mayor Dawe. "She has also been a fundraiser for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Foundation, helping to educate her school community about the cause."

"For someone so young [she] has made a tremendous impact on the world around her and no one who knows her has any doubt that about the incredible future that lies ahead of her. We're proud to say the future of someone who changed the world began right here in Aurora."

Josie, who also received a Youth Achievement Award alongside fellow Williams student Nicole Basso, came into Council chambers knowing she was set to pick up the Youth award but had no idea she would also walk away with Citizen of the Year.

Sitting beside her family and teacher Mark Fuller, the tears began to flow when Josie realised the list of accomplishments Mayor Dawe was reading belonged to her.

By the end of the ceremony, the award had not fully sunk in.

'I think it is a lot to be recognized,' Josie told The Auroran, wiping away a tear. 'Obviously, all the other Citizens of the Year have done amazing things for the community and it is really such an honour that I am considered with them. As the Mayor was talking, I sort of realised, 'this sounds like me, a little bit!' It wasn't until he talked about the holiday party when I thought, 'That's interesting, someone had the same idea as me!' Then I started crying. It's really amazing that I would be considered on the same level as the other amazing Citizens of the Year.'

Being awarded Citizen of the Year has only inspired Josie to double down on the work she has already done, not only in this, the last month of her high school career, but particularly when she starts university at the end of the summer.

'It is more motivation to keep doing what I'm doing,' she said.

For Mr. Fuller, this is indeed the legacy she will leave behind at Williams.

'We all know Josie's great, but I always wonder how she is perceived by somebody who doesn't know her at all, so this, to me, is very satisfying because it validates her efforts and reflects the impact she's had on her peers,' he said. 'We all know what she's done, we all know the impact she's had, and sometimes it is hard to articulate that to an outside audience. It is nice to know this message was well-received and someone her age can have that impact on the community. Her legacy will be the students who continue to carry on the impacts she's had and the events that she has put forward.'

Other Aurora residents honoured on Monday night include, in order of presentation are:

Youth Volunteer Award ? Nicole Basso, Josie Kearney

Green Award ? Aurora's Eco Festival Committee

Arts & Culture Award ? Bonnie Kraft

Community Leadership Award ? Trevor Stephens

Good Neighbour Award ? Shirley Cook

Community Safety Award ? Rob Johnson

Good Business Award ? FoxGlove Design Inc (accepted by Michelle Major)

Inclusivity Award ? Tyler Barker

In the weeks ahead, The Auroran will feature individual profiles of these winners.