

Van Schaik is Aurora's 2017 Citizen of the Year



By Brock Weir

Peter van Schaik's behind-the-scenes humanitarian work has led to him being described as an "unsung hero" in York Region, but now people have the chance to openly sing his praises.

Van Schaik was named Citizen of the Year at the 2017 Community Recognition Awards held Monday night at Town Hall. Van Schaik co-founded mental stamping company Van-Rob in 1979, which has grown into a wildly successful player in the automotive industry, but on Monday he was hailed for his philanthropic work, which has focused on health, education, and building the leaders of tomorrow – and by Mayor Geoff Dawe for his "selfless dedication" to Aurora.

"His determination, passion and perseverance have helped him to be a success as both a business owner and a volunteer," said Mayor Dawe. "And aside from the business savvy that he has exhibited in his life, he is a dedicated volunteer. He truly believes in generosity and giving back to his community."

Among his contributions most immediately recognizable to the public is his tireless work for Southlake Regional Health Centre and its Southlake Foundation. Under his leadership as campaign chair, they raised over \$80.8 million dollars for the local hospital – not only to build the Regional Cancer Centre itself, but going one step further in taking on the Images for Life campaign to build a second MRI suite.

"I first had the honour of meeting Peter in 2014 when I started working at the Southlake Foundation," said Neila Poscente, former CEO of the Southlake Foundation. "At that time, he had just joined the Foundation Board. Peter served as Director of the Foundation Board until 2015, putting in countless volunteer hours to help bring world-class care closer to home for the people of Aurora and our Region.

"Peter further demonstrated his commitment by serving on several sub-committees, but Peter didn't just attend meetings; he was always a well-prepared, active participant who asked challenging and insightful questions to ensure he was fulfilling the role to which he had committed as a leader from the community.

"He has dedicated a tremendous amount of time and talent as a leadership volunteer to making our community a better place. He has supported this commitment with personal philanthropy and by lending his good name to champion the many causes that are dear to his heart. Southlake would not be the hospital it is today if not for Peter van Schaik."

Outside the world of Southlake, van Schaik's reach can be felt in many areas, from his active support of the Robotics Club at St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School, to the Aurora Youth Soccer Club and the Aurora Ducks Swim Club to, most recently, taking on the role as Honourary Chair for "Happy Hearts," the new \$5 million capital campaign launched this month by Community Living Aurora Newmarket.

"He is an unsung hero in the community," says Rosalyn Gonsalves, former president of the Aurora Chamber of Commerce, who, in 2007, nominated him for the Business Person of the Year Award. "It was my feeling at that time as well he was an unsung hero in the community."

There came a time, however, when she realised the scope of the behind-the-scenes work being carried out and as soon as she retired from the Chamber, his was the first name that came to mind at nomination time.

Peter's involvement in the Southlake Foundation and Hospital have been innumerable in his discreet and non-flamboyant manner, she says. He has worked tirelessly as an unsung hero in our community for many years and there is no one more deserving of the award.

This is the same sentiment shared by his spiritual leaders as well. Van Schaik is an active member of Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church. Former Our Lady of Grace pastor Joe Gorman says soon after coming to Our Lady of Grace, Peter's contributions quickly became clear.

Peter Van Schaik is a remarkable man. He is a man of integrity, of compassion, he shoots straight from the hip, says Mr. Gorman. His contributions are not just monetary, it is his time, it is his talent, and it is his treasures. Everything comes back to family: his upbringing, his wife, his children, his grandchildren. Peter is a man, first and foremost, of family. Charity starts at home, it starts with his family, but as an example to his family, it shines to the people around him, not just the people of Aurora but the people across our community.

Peter is a quiet, simple man. He does things not out of recognition, he does things from the heart because it is the right thing to do. He makes people better, from the time he spends with them, from his advice and guidance, and he doesn't need the spotlight to do what he does. He does it because it is the right thing to do.

We want to work with Peter because he takes the time to get to know people, takes the time to get to know not just themselves, but their families and their friends.

As he listened to his praises being sung by the Mayor, Mr. Van Schaik's face became red as he realised he was not at Town Hall to see his wife Teresa receive an award as he was led to believe but that he was just about to receive the Citizen of the Year honour.

So, you can see I am not dressed up, but Teresa is! he said after being called up to receive his award. I have been very fortunate in life being blessed with health, wealth, and a lot of children and grandchildren, all healthy, so what more can one man ask for?

Having said that, giving back to the community is always a wonderful thing to do. The needs are always there, there's more needs than there is a capability, and that is one reason I do get involved.

Things are needed and because of that we step up to the plate [and] there is a campaign to be finished, so I know there are some people in the audience I will be calling on before the campaign will be over!