

York Regional Police honoured at annual appreciation night



By Angela Gismondi

Supporting Victims was the theme for the sold-out 22nd Annual York Regional Police (YRP) Appreciation Night.

The annual appreciation dinner gala took place on May 13 at the Paramount Conference and Event Venue in Vaughan. The event raises funds to support community police programs and equipment. Proceeds from this year's dinner will assist organizations like victims services of York Region in providing important support programs for people who have been victimized by crime or tragic circumstance.

The annual dinner showcases the good work being done every day by members of York Regional Police. Awards were presented to deserving men and women.

The Excellence in Policing Award was presented to 11 members of YRP and a crime analyst for their work in an investigation which led to a Toronto man being charged with the sexual assault of more than 20 female victims. The team, consisting of Detective Kevin Stoby, Detective Constable Marjorie Atkins, Detective Constable Jeffery Bright, Detective Constable Robert French, Detective Constable Deborah Gilmour, Detective Constable Shawna Leitch, Detective Constable Shane Mackenzie, Detective Constable Rebecca McGregor, Detective Constable James Ward, Detective Constable Stephen Yan, Constable Sean Briard and Crime Analyst Lee Anne Phillips came together to work on the case. Investigators learned the man was a Toronto pharmacist and was using prescription drugs in his possession to drug his victims. The team seized recording devices and discovered hundreds of hours of video and photos of women being sexually assaulted while unconscious. In the end the accused was charged with 21 counts of sexual assault and 21 counts of administering a noxious substance.

Teamwork is the reason why the group received the award, explained Stoby. Members from the Drugs and Vice, Sexual Assault and Technical Data recovery Unit came together to see the case to a successful conclusion.

"Prior to this none of us had worked together," explained Detective Stoby. "For everyone to be able to come together like that is huge, especially considering the horrific subject matter. I know how important team work is to York Regional Police and this team really pulled together."

Winning the award was gratifying, he added.

"It's a huge acknowledgement and it speaks to our shared values of teamwork."

The Garrett Styles Bravery in the Line of Duty Award was presented to Constable Natasha McLellan, the first officer on the scene after an ultralight plane went down in Georgina. She approached the pilot whose arm was trapped in a safety harness and found the entire area covered in fuel. With the help of a local pilot, McLellan freed the pilot. McLellan received the award for risking her life and averting tragedy.

The Rob Plunkett Outstanding Service to the Community Award was presented to Constable Andre Boteju for his community service work. After joining YRP in 2006, he encouraged his colleagues to support Holiday Heroes. Working in partnership with Loblaws Markham, more than 10,500 pounds of food and over \$20,000 has been collected for those in need over the past seven years. Boteju serves on the board of directors for Catholic Crosscultural Services which assists newcomers to Canada with integrating into Canadian culture.

The Herbert H. Carnegie Award for Improving Relationships with our Diverse Community was given to Detective Constable Mark Topping who is currently assigned as a hate crimes investigator with the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Bureau. Topping was honoured for building bridges in several communities. In particular, he has worked closely with the Women's Support Network, the Social Services Network, the South Asian Legal Aid Clinic and Parents, Family and Friends of Lesbians and Gays.

The Civilian Recognition Award was presented to Kimberley Pettit, the legal assistant for York Regional Police legal services. Since joining YRP in 2009, Pettit has volunteered for a number of events including Halloween and Holidays in the Village, Police Week Open House and the Special Olympics Ontario Summer Games.

Founded in 1992 by a volunteer group of appreciative local business owners, Police Appreciation Night has raised more than \$2 million to date.