

Young leaders of today honoured with Leaders of Tomorrow scholarship



Hailey Graham and Dabria Peta-Dragos have already made indelible marks on the Aurora and York Region communities as powerful advocates for their peers and, as they prepared to graduate high school last week, they were recognized as Leaders of Tomorrow.

Graham and Peta-Dragos were honoured in Council Chambers on Tuesday night with the John West Memorial Leaders of Tomorrow Scholarship.

Presented by the Town of Aurora each year to up to two students, and funded by a bequest to the Town of Aurora for this purpose by the late mayor John West, the Leaders of Tomorrow scholarships recognize the achievements of senior students attending high school in Aurora and who are moving on to post-secondary education at either university or college.

The recent grads were introduced to Council by Sparrow Als, Youth Programmer for the Town of Aurora, but many of the community contributions made by the recipients needed little introduction for local lawmakers.

“Hailey’s story is that of courage, perseverance, and advocacy,” said Als. “Working hard to overcome personal struggles early in life, Hailey became an active voice, advocating for others who didn’t feel as though they had a place amongst their peers. Through her position with York Region District School Board’s Youth Space Mental Health Initiative, she’s had the opportunity to lead symposiums on mental health awareness across York Region, using the results to design and implement a number of board-level projects that have been implemented in over 100 York Region schools.

“Hailey serves her immediate community as the Student Council president of her school, Dr. G.W. Williams, where she ensures that she focuses on promoting inclusivity and creating opportunities for all students to engage with their communities and thrive. Hailey utilized her passion and skill in music to co-create a brass quintet that has received national acclaim. Despite her busy schedule and high level of accommodation, Hailey makes sure that her ensemble finds time to give back by performing at the Chartwell Retirement Community for residents.”

Peta-Dragos, on the other hand, is a familiar face at Town Hall where she served two years as co-chair of Aurora’s Youth Engagement Committee (YEC).

“As a leader of the YEC, Dabria was integral in connecting the Town of Aurora’s recreation team and the Aurora youth community. She helped design, promote, and implement countless events and initiatives to connect youth to the Town, and more importantly, to one another,” said Als. “Along with her involvement with the YEC, Dabria has received honors for being the first ever two-term

president of the York Secondary Catholic Presidents Council, where she represented the voice of over 50,000 secondary students.

Dabria has used her role with the York Catholic District School Board to launch and sustain a record number of Board-wide initiatives, including but not limited to Spotlight of the Month, Good News Movement, Where Are They Now? and most notably, Secret Santa Presents for Indigenous Children, where she organized a gift drive for underprivileged Indigenous families in Nunavut. Dabria's advocacy and leadership extends beyond youth-specific engagements. Dabria spends the little free time she has volunteering at Southlake Hospital and Chartwell Retirement Home, where she spends time providing support and comfort to patients and residents.

Along the way, Peta-Dragos has been nominated for several scholarships and awards, and was the youngest-ever recipient of the University Health Network's STEM Observership where she shadowed Toronto General Hospital's chief thoracic surgeon.

This fall, Peta-Dragos is headed to McMaster University where she's been accepted into its Health Sciences program where Als said she hopes to continue exploring her passion for medicine during her time at school while continuing to support initiatives that give back to her community.

Graham, on the other hand, is headed to the University of Guelph for arts and sciences where she hopes to continue to exercise her personal pillars of advocacy, public service, and mentorship through university and into the workforce, drawing on her Auroran experience as she widens the scope of her initiatives and impact, said Als.

Hailey and Dabria, the Town of Aurora, Mayor and Council are incredibly proud of your accomplishments and contributions to our Town. We are honoured to present you both with the 2025 John West Memorial Leaders of Tomorrow Scholarship Award, said Als.

This sentiment was echoed by Mayor Tom Mrakas after this year's recipients were congratulated by lawmakers in the centre of the Chamber.

On behalf of the Town of Aurora, we are extremely proud and I know that you guys are excited to begin the journey, the next chapter of your lives as you go out into the world, into university. I think we're excited for you and I know you're very excited, he said. We know you're going to do great things and we know you're going to make Aurora proud.

There's lots of things that Aurora should be proud about, about many people. There's a lot on the sporting side, but you guys are on another side, which we should all be tremendously proud about. We know that we have such a bright future when we see youth, just like yourselves, stepping up and taking action. Thank you for what you do and we look forward to seeing what the future holds for both of you.

By Brock Weir