

Young leaders recognized with 2020 Give Back Awards

It remains to be seen whether students will be able to get back into their classrooms before the end of the 2019-2020 school year, but 20 Grade 12 students preparing for post-secondary education this fall have been recognized for the enduring legacies they have left behind.

Last week, Neighbourhood Network announced the 2020 recipients of the Give Back Awards, an annual cash prize donated by Magna International to recognize students, regardless of their specific post-secondary plans, who have dedicated themselves to making their schools and wider communities better places to live.

The program, which was founded by then-MP Belinda Stronach, has grown since its founding to include students from all five York Region municipalities in which Neighbourhood Network operates.

This year's recipients were announced to mark National Volunteer Week.

The Give Back Awards are traditionally handed out in a special ceremony held at Magna's Aurora headquarters, but present circumstances have made this year a digital celebration.

Among the 2020 Give Back Award recipients attending Aurora schools are:

AMANDA BISHOP (Aurora High School)

?Volunteering

has always been an important part of Amanda's life. Amanda belonged to Peer Mentors, Empowering Student Partnerships, Music Council, volunteers at York Music Camp and Student Voice Representative. She is president and founder of Aurobots, Aurora High School's first robotics team which also does outreach within the community. She has led toiletry drives for students in need at her school, she has created the 'Tulips for Autism' initiative where all proceeds were donated to Kerry's Place Autism Services and she has run free weeklong summer camps for girls, teaching them how to design their own website. Amanda puts in a lot of time and effort to make things happen because she cares about students, her high school and her community.

RALPH DAGHER (ESC Renaissance)

?Ralph not only displays leadership

qualities in his responsibilities at school, but he also serves as a mentor for the younger members of his school and community. Ralph is the student body president and spends a lot of his time organizing and executing events such as their school's first ever homecoming. He has also spent countless hours helping at his church summer camps, was a participant at the Central Ontario Leadership

Seminar and has volunteered at his former elementary school. After graduation Ralph plans on attending university to study architecture.?

MATTHEW DEO (St. Andrew's College)

?At a young age Matthew's parents taught him the importance of giving back. Matthew is very involved in his school and community. He has been on his school Community Council for three years and is now an executive member. He has organized Terry Fox Runs, built houses with Habitat for Humanity, has organized fundraisers to purchase instruments for students that couldn't afford them, and he has supported the Walk a Mile in Her Shoes which raises awareness of violence against women. Matthew's grandmother, who suffers from Alzheimer's, inspired him to form a band with some of his musician friends who would then play at senior's residences simply because he wanted to do something to bring them joy. A fun fact about Matthew is that he has a black belt in karate.?

LILY EDMUNDS (St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School)

?Lily has made multiple contributions to fellow students and citizens and has demonstrated a commitment to her community above and beyond expectations. Within school, Lily is part of the Best Buddies Program, connecting mainstream students with students who experience learning challenges and developmental disabilities. In her community, Lily has supported The Alzheimer's Society, Southlake Hospital, Markham Stouffville Hospital, Youth at Risk, Operation Hero, Because I am a Girl, the Heart and Stroke Foundation, and the list goes on. Lily is an accomplished cross-country runner who gave up training to continue volunteer work because it is truly where her heart is.?

SOPHIA FIORINI (St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School)

Sophia is very involved in both her school and community. Sophia has conducted research in microbiology, taught swimming lessons and performed lifeguard duties. In addition, she has served for her church community, has taken part in school clubs and teams, and has organized and led key fundraising initiatives. Giving Back to Sophia means good people working with other good people in order to accomplish and do extraordinary things. It is incredibly rewarding for Sophia to know that she can make a lasting impression.?

Next Week: The Auroran will spotlight five more local recipients: Kiana Mirshahi, Christina Paraskevopoulos, Elise Quail, Abigail Reist and Amanda Round.

By Brock Weir