

Youth honoured for volunteer work engaging community



A triple dose of youth excellence was in the spotlight in 2025 when the Aurora came together for the Community Recognition Awards where, for the first time, the Youth Volunteer Award was shared by three local high school graduates.

Aurora's Youth Volunteer Award is presented each year to a young citizen for their volunteer efforts and for making a ?significant contribution to the community by demonstrating what it means to be a positive leader.?

These are characteristics embodied by Angela Fang, who was the first of the trio to be recognized.

?Angela has made a significant impact on the Aurora Cultural Centre through her dedicated involvement over the past three years,? said Mayor Tom Mrakas, reading her citation. ?As a youth member of the Outreach Committee, she has provided invaluable insights that have shaped youth engagement strategies and the successful Youth Artists on the Rise program.

?Angela doesn't show up; she steps up, demonstrating that age is not a barrier to making an impact. Her leadership and commitment have fostered a vibrant and inclusive environment for young artists in our community.?

Reflecting on the honour, Fang said she was ?thankful? for the recognition and the opportunity to give back.

?I'm so thankful to be a part of the Aurora Cultural Centre for the last four years and to be a part of a community that prioritizes art and prioritizes making art accessible within Aurora,? she said. ?I have also been able to witness the growth of the Committee and the arts and culture in Aurora from the Committee still being in Town Hall to the reopening of the Cultural Centre within Town Square.

?I want to thank the Aurora Cultural Centre for giving me this opportunity and thank everyone here who has supported the Cultural Centre within their journey of growth and development. I hope you continue looking?forward to the new endeavours that are coming up as well.?

Hailey Graham was the second youth volunteer to be recognized for their contributions to Aurora.

?Throughout her high school journey, Hailey has demonstrated exceptional leadership and a deep commitment to creating inclusive communities, from organizing impactful school-wide events, to contributing to the York Region District School Board's mental health initiatives and supporting global causes. Her passion for making a difference is evident,? Mayor Mrakas continued. ?Hailey's

passion ignites possibility in others, empowering fellow youth to use their voices, take action, and shape the future of their community.

?She's driven by purpose and not driven by recognition, but by a desire to make things better, kinder, and more connected for everyone around her. Hailey's dedication to uplifting others and fostering a sense of belonging has positively impacted countless individuals.?

Reflecting on why she gives back, Hailey said it was all about making people feel like they're included.

?I do what I do to build community and to make every person feel like they have a place in every space they enter,? she said. ?I believe it is incredibly important to feel like you belong and that you have a cheerleading squad of people that are supporting you and cheering for your success.?

The third student, Naya Mueller, was recognized for her wide-ranging contributions to the community, despite only moving to the community a short time before.

?Naya has become an incredibly engaged and impactful youth volunteer,? said Mayor Mrakas. ?Naya's contributions have rippled outward toward touching lives and reminding us that youth leadership isn't the future ? it's here now.

?Her leadership style has been a force for good, turning compassion into action and transforming ordinary moments into meaningful change. Her involvement spans mentorship, student government, arts, environmental initiatives, community safety programs, and the Town's Youth Engagement Committee. Naya's diverse contributions and her passion for creating a welcoming and inclusive community make her an exemplary young leader.?

In turn, Naya said she was ?deeply honoured? to be acknowledged for her contributions.

?This award truly is a testament to my efforts ensuring that other youth can also hold this Town in the same high regard that I do,? she said. ?Serving as one of the co-presidents of the Youth Engagement Committee and being part of several councils at my school is my way of giving back to the community that enriched my upbringing. I hope to inspire other teens to initiate the change that they wish to see in the Town and also meet the amazing residents that live here in Aurora.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter