

Aurora's young Smart Commuters honoured for pedal power



By Brock Weir

By the time students get to Light of Christ Catholic Elementary School each morning, the bike racks are usually overflowing. Monday, however, was a slightly different story as Aurora dug out from the first significant snow storm of the season. Many students left their bikes at home that day, but were more eager than ever to bring out their wheels the next day, strap on their helmets, and head in for another school session.

After all, they have a reputation to live up to now as Light of Christ Catholic Elementary School (CES) was recognized with the Bike to School Week Award at Metrolinx' Smart Commute Awards.

The Bike to School Award was instituted by Metrolinx to recognize a participating school in York, Durham, Peel, Halton, Toronto, and Hamilton with the highest percentage of students that biked to school during the designated Bike to School Week.

"We are part of an enhanced Healthy Schools program with York Region Public Health and throughout the program last year we participated in Bike to School Week," explains Light of Christ Principal Travis MacDonald. "One of our staff members documented how many kids bike to school every day over the course of the week and, at the end of the week, our results were submitted to Metrolinx to be tabulated. We found out this fall that we had won as the York Region school with the highest participation rate and it was very exciting for us."

Light of Christ Catholic Elementary School, which is located on McClellan Way in southwest Aurora, has put a huge focus in recent years on developing a school culture encouraging healthy, active lifestyles and healthy eating for its school community.

In-school initiatives include healthy snack programs which sees upwards of 100 healthy snacks per day served up to students by dedicated parent volunteers. Outside programs are also brought in to engage students on how to get up and stay active.

"For me, biking is a really easy thing to do," says student Matthew H. "You just put on a helmet and you can go. It takes you places. If I can get a bunch of people to start biking, you can go in groups, go to places with friends, and talk and stuff."

Tyler D. agreed, adding, "It's good for the environment and it keeps us healthy and fit" but it is also fun."

"Most of the time parents are working and sometimes they don't have the time to drive you," notes Eric M. "You can call up your friends sometime and say, 'Hey, do you want to bike to school?' If you want to go to the park, you can bike to the park. If you want to go to the forest, you can bike to the forest and go everywhere with your friends."

Throughout the course of Bike to School week, Light of Christ students were encouraged to grab their handlebars through morning announcements. An extra incentive was added thanks to York Region Public Health who donated bike helmets and bells for daily draws.

Now that they have their plaque ready to hang up, the Light of Christ community is not content to rest on their laurels. Once the snow and ice is cleared, they plan to fill those bike racks up again while also stepping up their game.

"This year, we have expanded our Healthy School Committee from parents and staff members to students," says Mr. MacDonald.

"We have also partnered with the Healthy Kids Community Challenge and they are providing us with funding as well as expertise to

expand and develop the school culture into a more physically healthy one.

?To bring a lot of these programs in and to offer the healthy snack program on a daily basis and serve as many snacks as we are does cost money. Funding is one of the hurdles we're facing and partnering with the Healthy Kids Community Challenge has been wonderful because they provide us with funding to do the things we are doing.?