

Award recipients have ?given back? on local and international scale



By Brock Weir

Do you have a spare hour or two on your hands?

Alex Auger, Nicolas Chethuan, Sydney Cobbold, Alexander Harrison, and Mathilde Paré could give you some sage advice on just what to do with them. Collectively, these Aurora students have given back over 1,000 hours to their community over their high school years.

They were honoured this week among recipients of the 2014 Give Back Awards.

The Give Back Awards were established in 2014 by Belinda Stronach, then Member of Parliament for Newmarket-Aurora, with the salary she received serving in the House of Commons. Each \$500 grant is a way to recognize the good works students do from within the school community to the wider world as a whole. It is an award not necessarily contingent on academic success, or whether or not they were going to pursue university or college studies.

Nevertheless, Thursday's ceremony held in the glittering atrium of Magna's headquarters, honoured students from Aurora up to Georgina, who hit all the marks.

Over 870 hours of community involvement have been racked up by Alex Auger alone. A student at St. Andrew's College, he was saluted for his ?personal commitment to areas of community service and school leadership at SAC.

?Within his school, Alex volunteers as a school ambassador, as the tech designer for dramatic productions, as a lifeguard at swim meets, and as a fundraiser for causes like 30-Hour famine,? said the Give Back selection committee.

Alex also serves as president of St. Andrew's College's outreach committee, overseeing charitable endeavours pursued at the school and mentorship opportunities within its walls. Outside the expansive Aurora campus, he has also dedicating his time helping to improve education in Madagascar.

In February, Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School was transformed into a showcase of food and cuisine as students hosted ?Something for Sarah?, their second annual bone marrow drive and community event to benefit six year old Sarah, who is living with leukemia, and her family.

Sarah's was a plight which inspired Williams' students to take action, and two of the driving forces behind the campaign were also honoured.

Sydney Cobbold was one of the faces of the campaign. As the lead of the school's Peer Mentor program, she has provided leadership within the school environment on a number of fronts.

Through her bone marrow drive within the school, two students were matches for patients in need of bone marrow – incredibly beating the 1 in 22 million odds, said organizers. Sydney was also determined to bring the Terry Fox Run back to her school and, after a 20 year hiatus, she co-organized its successful return.

When it comes to giving back, Sydney has spearheaded significant efforts to engage the community and to support the local and global communities.

Alexander Harrison is also a Peer Mentor at Williams who helped drive 'Something for Sarah.' Harrison, the captain of the school's Relay for Life Team, has contributed to the community as a whole in anything from fundraising to sport.

He's an example of someone who has shown consistent commitment to the improvement of our community, said the committee. He believes that 'volunteering is an amazing way to give back to the community that gives so much to us.' He lives by these values, exemplified in his many volunteer roles – selling ribbons for Wounded Warriors, assisting the Aurora Minor Hockey Association at the Hockey Helps the Homeless Tournament, and with Neighbourhood Network's Spring Tree Planting Day.

Community and sport are also two watchwords for Nicolas Chethuan, a student at St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School. His many volunteer endeavours include the Neighbourhood Network Food Drive, Big Brothers Big Sisters of York, and assisting a children's orphanage in Colombia.

Nicolas believes that everyone should have the same educational and recreational opportunities regardless of their age, cultural background, physical abilities, or economical means, said the committee. Nick has spent many years volunteering within his local community and on a global scale. He has also taken on the role as mentor advocate for the Canadian Association of Disabled Skiing, where he helps students with physical and mental disabilities participate in the sport.

Hailed as the 'ultimate community ambassador', Mathilde Paré of École secondaire catholique Renaissance, has also had an impact within the local community and the wider world.

Mathilde plays an active role both in the community and her high school, they said. For over a year, Mathilde has volunteered at the Southlake Residential Care Village, where she helps as a program assistant. In 2012, she travelled to Honduras to build a house through Habitat for Humanity. She is currently working on a fundraiser for The Lavoie Foundation and will soon be riding her bike 300 km to Welland and back for this cause.