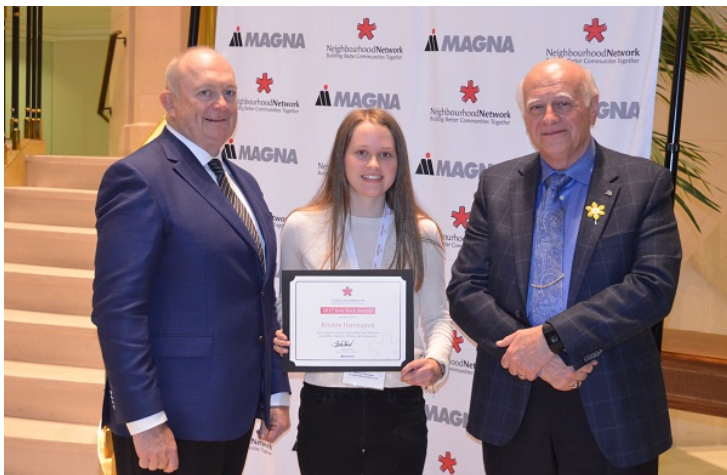


Harrington heads to university at the top of her class



By Brock Weir

All she wanted to do was do the best she could to secure a place to university.

Well, Kristen Harrington achieved that ? and then some! ? this spring.

Now she is spending this week settling into her new university routine, perhaps bolstered by the fact she graduated top of her class at St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School.

Kristen graduated St. Max with impressive 98.83 average, coming out on the top of the heap at the popular Aurora high school and the graduate with the eighth highest average across the entire York Catholic District School Board in a slate of the top graduates from all 16 York Region Catholic high schools.

?I did not have a specific goal in mind, in that sense,? says Harrington, who will be studying science at Queen's University in Kingston once classes start. ?I just wanted to do the best I could to get into universities. I really loved science and math, enjoyed physics and chemistry, and all the math courses I took were right up my alley.

?I felt honoured [to find out I had the top grade] because all my peers at St. Max are incredibly bright people, and I know lots of people in the community who are hard-working and smart individuals. So, to see I was among those people was really nice to hear.?

This is just the latest accolade received by Harrington.

Earlier this year, she was recognized by Magna International and Neighbourhood Network as a recipient of the 2017 Give Back Awards, a scholarship program founded by former Newmarket-Aurora MP Belinda Stronach to recognize students who contribute and ?give back? not only to their school community but the wider community as well.

First instituted as a program to recognize students in Aurora and Newmarket, it now provides scholarships to all communities in which Neighbourhood Network operates within York Region.

?When I heard I received the Give Back Award, I was incredibly honoured because I know there is such a large group of teenagers my age who are doing a lot to help the community, so to be chosen from amongst this group was an honour,? she says. ?I applied in the first place because I had a fair number of [community service] hours and I was told by my school officials to apply for every scholarship you can because you never know what you might win!?

Her journey giving back to her community began in Grade 8. The athletic Harrington, no stranger to softball, took things to the next level, spending time as a coach in the sport for up and coming athletes.

By the time she was in Grade 8, she developed a passion for working with kids with special needs.

?I had a friend who was working with kids with special needs and I really admired who they were and what they did, so I joined their program and started working with them,? she explains. ?Eventually, I worked my way up through the programs and was eventually hired to work with kids with special needs in youth programs.

?It gave me a lot of perspective on how fortunate I am to be able to do everything I set my mind to. It also gave me a lot of understanding about other people and what they're going through. I made a lot of friendships and realised that everyone is kind and has something special about them.?

It is not just local youngsters who have benefited from Harrington's community service, she has become a familiar face to seniors living in Southlake Village, the seniors' care facility adjacent to Southlake Regional Health Centre.

Harrington, given her love of science, always gravitated towards volunteer opportunities at the local hospital and when a chance came up at Southlake Village, she seized it. There, she visited with seniors, helped bring them snacks and even ran bingo nights! And yet, through all her community service, she was able to find the time to maintain that impressive average.

It really is all about balance, she says. You have to spend time with family and friends, but work hard when you need to for school. You have to find a way to spend your time so you are enjoying yourself but also working towards your goals.