

## Leading women, girls recognized as community builders



### By Brock Weir

Leadership can be demonstrated in many different ways by many different women and Newmarket-Aurora's community builders of today were recognized Monday night along with the leaders of tomorrow by MPP Chris Ballard at his second annual Leading Women, Leading Girls Awards.

Held in Newmarket, the ceremony recognized several young and mature women who have selflessly given back to their community through making large splashes, or making a huge difference in the life of an individual.

“The Leading Women Leading Girls Building Communities Award acknowledges and celebrates women and girls who demonstrate exceptional leadership in working to improve the lives of others in their communities,” said Mr. Ballard. “These recipients have encouraged women and girls to get involved in non-traditional careers, they are championing and promoting issues such as equality, diversity, healthy and equal relationships, and they raise awareness in the prevention of violence against women and girls and help in reducing racism and discrimination.

“These women and girls encourage others to participate in public service and act as positive role models through mentoring, coaching and volunteering. Our award winners tonight don't only provide a positive experience for women and girls but also for the men and boys they meet.”

Realtor Beverly Varcoe was the first to be recognized, singled out for her tireless work for the Aurora Figure Skating Club and her volunteer efforts in CHATS' (Community and Home Assistance to Seniors) therapy dog programs.

“Through this program, Beverly and her therapy dog have brought joy and comfort to the elderly clients, encouraging greater social engagement and many smiles,” reads Ms. Varcoe's citation.

She was also recognized for her work with the Canadian Federation of University Women and her spearheading of Newmarket's Zoomer Marketplace.

A familiar face in Aurora's sporting community, Nancy Black, founder and leader of the Master Ducks Swim Program, was also recognized for her work with the local chapter of Special Olympics Ontario and the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame, among many other organization and initiatives.

“Nancy continues to be a tireless leader who is an inspiration to all,” reads her citation. “She inspires people to live healthier and [more] active lifestyles and is helping to break down barriers for women in sport.”

Also recognized for her contributions to the sporting world was Lianne Schiavo, who has worked as score keeper for the Aurora Panthers, and has spent hundreds of unrecorded volunteer hours in providing opportunities for those interested in Canada's game.

?Lianne is a proven positive role model in everything she does.?

A leader within Aurora's Baha'i Community, Sanam Juliette Mojgani was recognized for her work as a role model for youngsters, imparting ?moral and spiritual? guidance, volunteering at local hospitals, providing tutoring for younger kids, and myriad other activities.

?She has created an environment for her younger peers to bring about constructive changes to their communities and has promoted kindness, service to humanity, and unity in diversity.?

Jointly recognized for their creation of the Father Daughter Snowflake Ball were snap'd Aurora's Melanie Bell and Jennifer Copley of Highland Automotive Group. The Ball, which benefited Girls Inc., among others, will go a long way in making positive changes for girls across York Region. Additional funds were also allocated to Big Brothers Big Sisters of York to support their Go Girls! Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds campaign, which focuses on building and bolstering the self-esteem and leadership skills of girls in the community.

Young leaders were also represented at Monday's ceremony by Aurora sisters Amanda and Lexi Benlolo, both students at Country Day School, who spearheaded the ?Pampered Pillowcase? program to benefit the Women's Centre of York Region. The initiative involved gathering wish lists from the Centre's clients to create packages to make them feel good through items ranging from toiletries to cosmetics to slippers.

So successful was the girls' initiative, it has been taken up by the school's Social Justice team as an ongoing endeavour.

Also recognized was long-time community volunteer Robin Taylor Smith, whose community involvement is as varied as past president of the Aurora Chamber of Commerce, long-time volunteer with the Aurora Chamber Home Show and the Optimist Club of Aurora. Presently, Ms. Taylor Smith is in high gear helping to organize the annual Run/Walk for Southlake.

?Through her participation as co-chair, she promotes health, fitness and involvement from the community. Robin's activities in the community help improve the lives of women and girls. She is a role model for all women and girls who wish to get involved, lead and make a difference.?