

Sport Aurora's 13th annual recognition ceremony honours 23 volunteers



Veteran Emcee Stephen Forsey convened over 125 guests at Aw, Shucks on Sunday morning for Sport Aurora's 13th Annual Recognition Ceremony to honor 23 volunteers from 19 athletic organizations.

Forsey, who has served as a volunteer convener for the four-division Aurora Oldtimers Hockey League for the last eighteen years, introduced a series of dignitaries including MPP Dawn Gallagher Murphy (Newmarket-Aurora), MPP Michael Parsa (Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill), and Mayor Tom Mrakas who brought greetings from various seats of government.

Mayor Mrakas, always an ardent advocate of community volunteers and youth sports, thanked the honorees, noting that "volunteers are integral to our community sports organizations," and complimented "the passionate and dedicated volunteers who provide high-quality experiences for our athletes."

Sport Aurora President Ron Weese welcomed the guests to the cozy restaurant setting and acknowledged "the resilience of the Aurora sports community" to overcome the scourges of COVID and its impact on local athletic clubs.

Expressing existential relief about returning to normal public receptions to honor athletes and volunteers, Weese informed the group that "this is the largest group of volunteers that we have recognized in thirteen years."

He thanked a range of hard-working Sport Aurora staff, including Laurie Mueller, Neil Moore, and Karla Lees, who organize and publicize so many annual events that celebrate participation in sports, athletic achievements, and the spirit of volunteerism.

Forsey, looking elegant as always in his traditional tuxedo and displaying the comic timing that has become his trademark, introduced guest speaker Jim Clark who extolled the virtues of volunteerism in his keynote address.

A resident of Aurora since 1988 and Chair of the 2019 LPGA Event held at Magna Golf Club, Clark described volunteers as "the fabric of the community" and applauded their significant efforts.

Clark, a 2019 inductee into the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame, described the joys of volunteering at Oakville's Glen Abbey and noted how his early years of volunteering led to a satisfying 40-year connection to the course and, by extension, the CPGA's annual events.

He closed his speech with a sentimental and enduring message: "When you see someone volunteering, remember to thank them for volunteering. It will make them feel good and you'll feel good, too."

The celebratory event was not without gravity as Emcee Forsey summoned a moment of silence from attendees out of communal respect for Aurora Barbarian 16U rugby player and Barrie resident Jady Sage who passed away tragically and unexpectedly on October 2.

Weese closed the ceremony by making a special presentation to Dr. Doug DeGallais, who received the Sport Aurora Honorary Member Award, only the second time such an award has been bestowed in the 13 year history of the influential sports umbrella group. Among Dr. DeGallais's significant contributions to the sporting body was implementing Sport Aurora's Breakfast of Champions, a very popular annual reception that celebrates an array of athletic achievements by the member clubs.

Most importantly, the following community volunteers, who have made a significant difference to their respective sports organizations and have made our community a better place, were honored at the downtown reception: Ashley Hogue (Central York Girls Hockey Association); Lauren Demers and Zack Moore (Aurora Barbarians); Craig McConnell (Aurora Lawn Bowling); Raegan Sighn (Elevation Athletics); Jo-Anne Scott (Aurora Skating Club); Jenn Karlovcec (York Artistic Swim Club); Dave Noble (York North Basketball Association); Robert Lees (Aurora Tigers Junior A Hockey); Robyn Stafford (Storm Volleyball); Tom Lamphier (Team Ontario); Alan Peck (Aurora Minor Hockey Association); Bruce Russell (York Oldtimers); Jack So (Aurora Master Ducks); Anita Barnes (Toronto and North York Pony Club); Tammy Orlando (Aurora King Baseball Association); Lee Green and Todd Martin (Aurora Diggers Baseball); Jennifer Bentley and Ailsa Sinclair (Aurora Community Tennis Club); James Thornley (Redbirds Lacrosse); and Cheryl Duckworth and Leslie Nagy (Special Olympics Ontario?Aurora).

By Jim Stewart