

## YCDSB recognizes Petrillo, Nembhard, Rossi, Anderson, Calarco, and La Neve as Distinguished Alumni Award Winners



The York Catholic District School Board honored six of its graduates in a ceremony at the Catholic Education Centre on Tuesday.

CBC and TSN Sportscaster Andi Petrillo, NBA rookie guard Andrew Nembhard of the Indiana Pacers, Digital Marketer and Cartoonist Daniele Rossi, Television Producer and Station Manager James Anderson, UT Professor and Researcher John Calarco, and Sick Kids Registered Nurse Maria-Rosa La Neve brought video greetings to the 350 attendees gathered in the CEC's Board Room.

In a telephone interview, Petrillo reflected on the best part of being named a 2023 Distinguished Alumni Award Winner. The graduate of St. Joan of Arc CHS noted that "all the memories keep flooding back and I've had a chance to relive the good times and go through my memorabilia from elementary school and high school. It's been a really nice trip down memory lane."

Petrillo, a pioneer in broadcasting whose work at Leafs TV, Hockey Night in Canada, CBC's Olympic Coverage, and her radio program Leafs Lunch on TSN Radio 1050 earned her a Canadian Screen Award for Best Sports Host, felt "humbled" when she was contacted by the YCDSB.

"You can't believe it at first. I've tried to be the best version of myself and it was great to know I had such an impact on my community and my teachers. I cherished their lessons."

In a wonderful moment of synergy, one of Petrillo's "teachers" was also a fellow honoree on Tuesday night.

James Anderson, an intrepid veteran television producer and station manager, mentored Petrillo during her formative years as a volunteer student at Rogers' Newkirk studio in Richmond Hill. She acknowledged how deserving Anderson is of the recognition and how important he was to her career.

"He was my first producer; the first person in my ear and the first person to give me a broadcasting opportunity. He was the "Voice of God" in my ear and used his sense of humor to keep us positive. We were a bunch of volunteers cutting our teeth at the studio and, my goodness, I was rough. He was so patient with me."

Petrillo applauded her mentor's place among the board's 2023 Distinguished Alumni: "So good for him! Jim's a special person, a calming and professional influence on so many."

Petrillo's modest mentor whose 37-year career in community television has, indeed, been incredibly influential was similarly humbled by the honor bestowed upon him at the CEC ceremony.

With this list of honorees, I'm not sure where I fit in, but I've always viewed the broadcasters I've nurtured over the years as my extended family. It's been very satisfying to set up so many in their careers. Being recognized by the Board and appearing on the posters that are displayed in all the schools is really a validation for me and the hundreds of broadcasting students I've helped form.

The affable graduate of St. Robert Catholic High School and Our Lady Help of Christians CES views his work in television studios as a vocation where I have managed some amazing people and their careers. I made a choice years ago that this would be my career and it has given me so much satisfaction.

Anderson's fellow honoree, Daniele Rossi, was equally moved by the experience of being named as a Distinguished Alumni.

After hearing everybody's stories, we're all ordinary people who have achieved so well in our fields.

The graduate of St. Elizabeth CHS found the ceremony a bit scary there was a lot of nervousness when I accepted the award but it felt very nice to be recognized.

Rossi's influential book, *Stuttering is Cool*, is used by speech therapists and his podcast of the same name supports many people who stutter.

I never thought the podcast would last but here we are at 48 episodes. The book has sold so well I am writing a second one. I love encouraging kids to overcome their challenges and I'm happy that my comic books have had a positive impact on kids that stutter.

Rossi has been drawing comics and stuttering for most of [my] life and he offers encouragement to his on-line community Stutter Social.

The third award winner in attendance at the CEC ceremony was Registered Nurse Maria-Rosa La Neve.

The clinical research nurse coordinator and RSV nurse coordinator at Sick Kids Hospital in Toronto found the YCDSB's honor to be a bit overwhelming, but it was so nice to be recognized with my sister and husband present to share the moment with me.

Le Neve, currently working in the Division of Infectious Diseases specifically in the Respiratory Syncytial Virus program soldiered through the darkest days of the COVID Pandemic.

She was surprised and honored to be selected as Distinguished Alumni, but was truly moved to be getting recognition as a nurse.

The graduate of St. Robert Catholic High School is a community leader and strives every day to advocate for people who can't advocate for themselves in her administrative and nursing role at Sick Kids Hospital.

La Neve's gratitude towards her high school community was evident in her video address in which she thanked her science teachers who were professional, inquisitive, and intellectual.

In a video, NCAA and professional basketball star Andrew Nembhard also thanked his teachers, specifically at St. Jerome CES, who taught me to be myself and provided a positive influence and an early start to his career.

Nembhard, who recently completed his NBA rookie season with the Pacers, enjoyed a number of magical moments in his inaugural year in the league. Perhaps most noteworthy was his stellar 25-point performance at the Scotiabank Arena in a 118-114 win over the

Raptors.

Nembhard gave back to his community in March by providing tickets for 200 friends and family.

Included in this group was Nembhard's Grade 8 teacher and basketball coach Glenn Reid from St. Jerome CES. The north Aurora school was the place where Nembhard succeeded as a student-athlete and spent some of his most formative years.

Also acknowledging his teachers via video was Professor John Calarco who thanked his science teachers at Father Bressani CHS who went far and beyond the usual and let me do individual experiments in the lab after school. Their care and compassion for my love of science was so important.

The assistant professor and researcher does extensive research in the Department of Cell and Systems Biology at the University of Toronto. He has also served as a Canada Research Chair in Neural RNA Biology and started a research lab at Harvard University, according to the YCDSB's Media Advisory.

The YCDSB's Distinguished Alumni of 2023 have certainly satisfied the board's performance criteria by making significant contributions to their respective careers and communities.

**By Jim Stewart**