

Community leaders celebrated at ‘COTY’ reception

By Shawn Loughlin
The Citizen

Last Thursday, North Huron Publishing hosted its first Citizen of the Year Awards night since 2019, awarding winners from the past four years at Trinity Anglican Church in Blyth.

It was a full house, with several dozen in attendance, including nominators, past Citizen of the Year Award winners and several members of the community. *Citizen* Publisher Deb Sholdice, Editor Shawn Loughlin and Reporter Scott Stephenson conducted the ceremony.

First, Annie Sparling was honoured as the 2020 Citizen of the Year Award winner for the Blyth community. She won the award thanks to her extensive involvement with the Blyth Community Betterment Group and persistence in resurrecting both a Blyth Santa

Claus parade and the popular Rutabaga Fest.

Sparling was unable to attend and sent her regrets and thanks.

Bob Kellington was then honoured for posthumously winning the 2020 Citizen of the Year Award for Brussels.

Kellington passed away in 2020, but had dedicated much of his life to volunteerism. He was heavily involved with the Brussels Lions Club and organized fundraisers for his local church and the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, a cause for which he was especially passionate.

Marguerite Thomas, Kellington’s widow was unable to attend, but shared a message of hope for other widows and widowers, suggesting that friends and family check on survivors for weeks, months and years after their spouses pass away. “We didn’t die when our spouses did,” she said.

The 2021 winner of the Blyth

Citizen of the Year Award was also awarded posthumously - David Cartwright, who had decades of volunteerism with the First Blyth Scouts and Trinity Anglican Church, the very building in which the celebration was taking place.

David’s wife Shari and daughter Brittany were both on hand to help celebrate David’s legacy.

The 2021 Brussels Citizen of the Year Award winner, Zoellyn Onn, was in attendance and thanked everyone for nominating her and recognizing her efforts in the community.

Onn won the award thanks to her extensive involvement in Brussels as a member of the Brussels Horticultural Society, Brussels Agricultural Society and Brussels Lions Club, serving as president of the latter two organizations. She is also the founder of the Brussels Fairy Door Trail and had been instrumental in bringing a number

of initiatives to fruition, such as the return of the Brussels Farmers’ Market, the community choral group Sing Sing and more.

In her capacity as a Lions Club member, she also served as a mentor and leader for the Brussels Leo Club, which has accomplished much within the village since being revived just over a decade ago.

The 2022 Blyth Citizen of the Year winner was Lissa Kolkman, who won due to her work with the Friends of the Village of Blyth group, serving as one of its most prominent members and as its liaison to North Huron Council.

She and her fellow volunteers have worked to beautify the village and maintain its public gardens for many years, in addition to hosting the Christmas wreath competition and Easter Egg hunt on the Greenway Trail.

She has also volunteered with the Blyth Festival and Blyth

United Church over the years.

Kolkman was in attendance as well and simply thanked those who nominated her and supported her win, saying she was honoured to be listed among such notable volunteers and community members.

The 2022 Brussels Citizen of the Year winner was Margaret McInroy thanks to her work with the Walton Women’s Institute and the Melville Presbyterian Church, including its bestselling anniversary cookbook, in addition to working with Soup and More 2 and other fundraisers throughout the Brussels and Walton communities.

McInroy took the opportunity to address those in attendance, thanking her nominators and those who selected her as the winner.

She said her spirit of volunteerism can be chalked up

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Past four years of ‘COTY’ winners honoured

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to the encouragement of two men - one was her father Wilfred Shortreed and the other is her husband Rick. As a child, Margaret said she was encouraged to be part of a team and to take that commitment seriously. And when she was encouraged to volunteer, she was also pushed to go the extra mile and be a member of the executive, which she still practises to this day.

The 2022 (and first-ever) winner of the Huron County Citizen of the Year Award, Karen Webster of the Wingham area, was also in attendance that night.

Webster was honoured for her work with the Blyth Repository of History, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Wingham and the Meals on Wheels program, among others.

She has gone on missionary trips and created pre-cut personal protective equipment kits for the Wingham and District Hospital in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic when personal protective equipment was at a premium.

She thanked everyone for the honour and said it was humbling to be recognized among so many other inspiring volunteers.

To end the evening, the 2023 winners received their plaques and were honoured.

Joe Gahan and Megan Lee-Gahan were recognized for their invaluable work in founding the Blyth Kids Club, which is always expanding to include new programming and offerings, such as soccer, hockey, arts and crafts, disco nights and summer parties.

Joe acknowledged the gracious support of the community saying that, thanks to extensive donations, the club is now free to all, while Megan thanked all of the club's volunteers and patrons who have made it such a force within the village.

The 2023 Brussels winner, Roxane Nicholson, was honoured for her work with the Brussels, Morris and Grey Community Centre's Inspiring our Future campaign, raising money for the renovation and expansion of the centre.

The campaign's fundraising goal was increased several times as costs rose and it still exceeded that final

\$2 million number by more than \$500,000. She has also been extensively involved with the North Huron Community Food Share over the years.

Nicholson thanked the entire campaign and all of its volunteers for the work involved, as well as her family members, who she said are often roped into helping with her endeavours through being "volun-told" to do things.

She also thanked *The Citizen*, saying that without a powerful local newspaper, local projects, achievements and activities would not be heralded throughout the community as they are.

The final winner of the night was Wayne Clausius from the Grand Bend area.

Clausius began his career as a volunteer in 2009, putting his name forward to help with The Salvation Army in Goderich and his role in the community only stood to grow from there.

For over a dozen years, Clausius worked with the Community Volunteer Income Tax Program. In its first year, just over a dozen people applied, compared to what is now hundreds of people. The program has since retrieved millions of dollars for low-income people and families, putting money back in the pockets of those who need it most.

Clausius is currently a resident of Jessica's House hospice in Exeter and was presented his award by Sholdice and Loughlin on Sunday, Nov. 19 at a small event that included Clausius's children, other family members and some of his fellow volunteers.

In an e-mail to *The Citizen*, Clausius said he accepted the award on behalf of the more-than 20 volunteers who have helped him administer the program over the years.

Nominations for the 2024 Citizen of the Year Awards will open within the first few months of the new year. Consider nominating someone whose work in the community within that year has improved life for those around them.

Nomination forms will be published in *The Citizen* on a regular basis or nominations can be e-mailed directly to Loughlin at editor@northhuron.on.ca.



Recognized

Citizen of the Year Award winners were presented with plaques at an event held on Thursday, Nov. 23. Above, Editor Shawn Loughlin addresses the crowd. Right (above), Reporter Scott Stephenson (left) and Publisher Deb Sholdice (right) with 2023 Brussels COTY winner Roxane Nicholson (centre). Right (below) Loughlin (right) with 2023 co-Blyth COTY winners Joe Gahan (left) and Megan Lee-Gahan (centre). Below, Sholdice (right) with 2023 Huron County COTY winner Wayne Clausius (left). (Shawn Loughlin / Scott Stephenson photos)





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