

BACKGROUND



Abilities Awards Recipients 2014

Category: Citizenship

Recipient: Kristin Hayes

Kristin is the embodiment of the true sense of “ability”. She is an accessibility evangelist - advocating for improved access and social inclusion for herself and others.

She is a Markham Accessibility Advisory Committee member and organizer of the Markham Accessibility Fair, a synchronized swimmer, a ballroom dancer, and a mentor. In her spare time, she’s a speech-language pathologist.

She says being on four wheels gives her a different perspective – a different angle – that allows her to better help others. She says: “Regardless of abilities, if there’s something you’re interested in, you should pursue it.

Give new things a try and don’t be afraid to adapt sports or activities. Coach your coaches, and other participants, on how to do things to suit your abilities. Find creative solutions.”

Category: Advocacy

Recipient: Carion Fenn

Carion has demonstrated great passion for educating the public about accessibility issues; an advocate and inspiration for others who experience difficulties in accessibility.

An interior designer by trade, Carion is a leader in her community, and extremely effective at networking and bringing people together.

After being diagnosed with a rare spinal cord injury after a car accident, she set out to create more public awareness about her condition.

She runs a support group and through a foundation that bears her name, tells her community and the world that “Together we are Stronger”.



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Category: Arts (individual)

Recipient: Shawn Brush

Shawn sings and teaches music. With guitar in hand, either solo or backed by some of the industry's finest musicians, Shawn, known as the Krooked Cowboy, is an artist that shines.

Shawn prides himself on giving back to the community. He believes in sharing his stories as an inspiration to others.

He says "to travel a krooked road brings great experiences." A local favourite, Shawn plays and sings all over the Golden Horseshoe and beyond.

He is recognized and respected by his peers, having appeared in national media and performed both in studio and on stage. A powerful presence, he is a must see.

Category: Arts (group)

Recipient: 'RARE' Theatre Company

This past summer, RARE in association with Soulpepper and supported by Spinal Cord Injury Ontario, put on a play called **Borne**. The play was performed at the Young Centre for the Performing Arts at the Distillery District in Toronto to sold-out audiences.

Borne is a play that was created by Judith Thompson, the theatre company's Artistic Director and renowned playwright, from the stories and ideas of the brilliant ensemble of:

- Dan Raralio,
- David Shannon,
- Harley Nott,
- Joshua Dvorkin,
- Maayan Ziv,
- Nancy Xia,
- Nikoletta Erdely,
- Russell Winkelaar and
- Dan Harvey.

Each cast member is a person with a spinal cord injury who tells their own raw and bold personal story. A mix of art and advocacy, the play offers an open and honest account of living with a spinal cord injury. Brenda Surminski is the company's Executive Director and Nick Hutcheson is its Artistic Producer.



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A region-wide community celebration of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

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Category: Lifestyle

Recipient: Bret Wills

Brett is an athlete with Cruisers Sports for People with the Physical Disabilities since the age of 7 and is an exemplary member of the community. He is a hard working goalie for the Red Dogs Sledge Hockey Team and player representative of the league. He's always out to encourage his teammates and lend a helping hand.

He is a team player, motivational and an inspiration to his teammates and those who know him.

Category: Media

Recipient: Jahmeelah Gamble

You already know Jahmeelah produces and hosts *A Voice for All*, now in its third season, on Rogers Cable 10 here in Peel Region. Each week, the show empowers individuals and organizations, and promotes awareness about the experiences of parents and front line staff.

Jahmeelah's passion for her work grew through working with the City of Brampton's special needs programs and with students with disabilities at the Peel District School Board. She often refers to her students as the "teachers."

Jahmeelah is also the co-founder of the non-profit *Empower Me Fitness and Education*, which runs a free program for adults with developmental disabilities. And she provides workshops on advocacy, parent empowerment, and does respite, coaching and public speaking.

She is an inspiring, supportive champion of accessibility in our community.

Category: Caregiver

Recipients: Judith Elaine and Patrick Lee

Judith and Patrick are the parents of a son who has autism. They founded Project Autism just over a year ago to provide free activities to families throughout the community.

They proudly promote their son's art and inspire other youth with autism to promote their passion and skills. They and the volunteers that work with them have been a great support to families of children with autism in our community.



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Category: Service Provider

Recipient: Jane New

Jane is The Riverwood Conservancy Enabling Garden Program Coordinator. The Enabling Garden is a program that operates out of the Riverwood Conservancy in partnership with the City of Mississauga.

In operation for just over 2 seasons, this hands-on teaching garden is fully accessible. Programs encourage general health and wellness for physically and developmentally disabled children, youth, adults and older adults and their caregivers in our region.

Jane develops a variety of activities dependent on the season and the abilities of the group. The garden is a caring and supportive environment for those with disabilities and the programs Jane has designed provide each individual with an opportunity for success.

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