



AC Accessibility Awards Celebrates Innovation in Accessibility

Winners creating change to reimagine how we live, work and play

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 6, 2023, Whitby, ON: This weekend the AC Accessibility Awards Gala raised \$250k to continue the essential work of breaking down barriers. The event shone a light on creating innovative change in how we live, work and play.

We applaud all the nominees for their efforts in advancing accessibility. The winners have unlocked potential in the areas of employment, education, sport, and technology.

The awards recognized a host of nominees in five categories: the Accessible Employer Award, Community Champion, Accessibility Moment of the Year, the Trailblazer Award and the Jim Flaherty Award for Leadership in Accessibility and Inclusion.



Abilities Centre's Vice President of Programs, Partnerships and Impact presents the Accessible Employer Award to Farm Boy.

The Accessible Employer Award was presented to Farm Boy. The local Whitby store has worked alongside our skills development and employment program to interview and hire several workers with disabilities. We look forward to our continued relationship.



David Myers, Director of HR for Miller Waste Systems presents the Community Champion award to Christine Congrady from the Durham Catholic District School Board.

Our Community Champion is Christine Congrady from the Durham Catholic District School Board. This award is presented to someone who has demonstrated dedication to making their community more accessible and inclusive through a specific advocacy initiative. Christine spearheads Project Search, a school-to-work training program for students with disabilities. She developed the program from the ground up and today provides a program offering over 700 hours of hands-on work experience at host business sites with the end goal of meaningful local employment.



John Watkins, head coach of the Whitby Vikings Rugby Club accepts the award for Accessibility Moment of the Year, with representatives of his team behind him.

The Accessibility Moment of the Year is near and dear to many participants at Abilities Centre. This award recognizes a pivotal moment in the past year that contributed to moving accessibility and inclusion further locally, provincially, nationally, or even internationally. The award went to John Watkins and the Vikings Mixed Ability Rugby Team. The Vikings are the first Mixed Ability rugby team in Canada and came in second at the International Mixed Ability Rugby Tournament in Cork, Ireland.



Interim President & CEO of Abilities Centre Mark Wafer (right) presents the Trailblazer Award to Austin Riley.

The Trailblazer Award was won by 24-year-old racer, Austin Riley. This young trailblazer is continually challenging the status quo. When he started, he was the first and only driver living with autism. Today, he has been racing 15 years and, in 2021, won the Radical Cup Canadian Championship for the second time. In 2022, he won the Radical Cup North America Pro 1340 championship. Through his accomplishments, Austin has broken down barriers and his success is an inspiration to youth with disabilities everywhere who have been told they can't follow their dreams.



Christine Elliott, John, Galen, and Quinn Flaherty present the Jim Flaherty Award to Shanjay Kailayanathan.



The Jim Flaherty Award for Leadership in Accessibility and Inclusion is presented to a person who has made a significant contribution toward the promotion, development and advancement of accessibility and inclusion. Our winner Shanjay Kailayanathan was involved in a car accident at the age of 15 that left him paralyzed from the chest down. He went on to receive a degree in software engineering and start his own accessibility innovation company, Axessiom Technologies. His driver assistance system uses facial features and voice recognition software to activate distinct functions of a vehicle making driving safer and more accessible.

This award is named after the Honourable Jim Flaherty to recognize his vision of an accessible and inclusive space for everyone in the Durham Region. Today, Abilities Centre has changed its address from Gordon Street to 1 Jim Flaherty Street. Mayor Elizabeth Roy, Christine Elliott and her sons John, Galen and Quinn Flaherty unveiled the new street sign. It was a fitting tribute to his memory.

Abilities Centre looks forward to continuing to bring attention to the important pioneers and innovators in our community and beyond. Together we will continue to unlock potential, break down barriers and redefine the way we all live, work and play!

About Abilities Centre

Abilities Centre exists to unlock potential through accessibility. Whether through vocational services, therapeutic recreation, adult day programs, or sport and recreation, every program and service at Abilities Centre is aimed at re-imagining how Canadians live, work and play. We continue to focus our impact to build towards an inclusive, barrier-free life for all Canadians.

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