

Caledon resident received Lincoln M. Alexander award

By Bill Rea

Inclusiveness is something that has always been very important to Tia John.

She has worked hard for it, and that was recently recognized when the young ValleyWood resident was one of the recipients of the Lincoln M. Alexander Award.

John is currently in her first year studying criminology at Wilfrid Laurier University, but she was part of a Planning for Independence Leadership Program while in Grade 12 at St. Edmund Campion Secondary School in Brampton. Through the program, she got the chance to work with fellow students who were physically or mentally challenged.

"I found an emotional attachment with my students," as he said.

John said she was among 15 students who had been selected by teachers to run the program.

She said she had been bothered by the way some of these students had faced exclusion. So among other things, she made a point of sitting with them in the school cafeteria at lunch. That idea spread to her friends and classmates.

"That made everyone think it was okay to interact with students," she said.

She added that some of the students at the school had not been involved.

"That's where I wanted to make a change in the school community," she said.

The program continues this year. She was at the school recently, and the students she worked with recognized her and are interacting in school activities.

"I wasn't surprised," she said.

As well, John helped coordinate school events to break down social barriers, raise awareness of discrimination and promote inclusiveness. She also played a key role in the school's annual Culturefest, which attracted more than 400 participants.

It was staff members at St. Edmund Campion who nominated John; specifically Guidance Counsellor Andrea Pearl, Principal Peter Cusumano and teacher Sanjeev Malhortra.

"I didn't do it for recognition," John commented about the award. "It was a complete shock when I received the call."

The award presentation took place Feb. 23 at the Lieutenant-Governor's Suite at Queens Park.

"It was a wonderful experience," she said.

The Lincoln M. Alexander Award is presented annually to three young people who have demonstrated exemplary leadership in promoting positive social change. The award was created in 1993 in honour of Ontario's 24th Lieutenant-Governor, who was in office from 1985 to 1991.

