

Education workers honoured at Inspiring Excellence Awards



By Nate Smelle

On May 23, Hastings Prince Edward District School Board held its annual Inspiring Excellence Award Ceremony. Eight employees of the HPEDSB were honoured at this year's event, including four from North Hastings. According to the school board, the Inspiring Excellence Awards are "the highest recognition for HPEDSB employees who make significant contributions to student achievement and well-being through their commitment to and leadership in education." The list of local winners includes: Jennifer Burbidge, secondary teacher, North Hastings High School; Robert Freymond, elementary teacher, York River Public School; Linda Holbrook, head secretary, Bird's Creek Public School; and Jeffery Mills, custodian, North Hastings High School. In a showing of appreciation for the local educators and education workers dedication to providing students with a high quality education and learning environment, the community stepped up to nominate each of the winners from North Hastings. More than a couple dozen nomination letters were sent into the school board from current and former students, parents, teachers, and education workers recognizing excellence within the education system in North Hastings. In support of Holbrook's entry for the Inspiring Excellence Award, Jennifer Card, a parent of former students at Bird's Creek Public School wrote: "She is extremely adept in her administrative role and fosters a culture of excellence and high expectations for those around her, including staff and students," said Card. "She always maintains a clean and tidy front office and encourages others to use the space respectfully and responsibly. She is always compassionate with students and invests in student success, such as showing them how to perform tasks rather than doing it for them (e.g. zipping up a coat)." Her calming, loving demeanour also means she is constantly looking out for the safety and well-being of everyone in the school. I'm sure she has placed thousands of band-aids and ice packs on students over the years and keeps them under her watchful eye until parents arrive. She consoles anyone that needs it and is an empathetic listener. She is always aware of

comings and goings at the school, and you couldn't ask for a sweeter person to greet you at the door. Writing in on behalf of Freymond, was one of his fellow teachers at York River Public School, Ben Gaebel. In his letter, Gaebel stated: "Over the past decade, I've had the privilege of witnessing Bob Freymond's unwavering commitment to enhancing student success and achievement, particularly through his hands-on approach in our school's woodshop. Remarkably, our elementary school maintains a functioning workshop—a rarity—largely due to Bob's dedication. If you were to ask any of his past or present students about Mr. Freymond, they'd undoubtedly mention the woodshop. It's a space where Bob's dual passions for teaching and woodworking converge, igniting enthusiasm in students who may otherwise struggle in traditional classrooms. I've observed firsthand how students come alive when allowed to work with their hands, creating wood projects they can take pride in." North Hastings High School teacher, Heather Taylor sent a letter, recognizing her colleague Jeff Mills. Celebrating Mills and his contribution to the school community, Taylor said: "Jeff Mills is a consummate professional. As a custodian at North Hastings High, you may not necessarily think that a person in his position could inspire excellence, and yet he does, every day. Jeff works diligently at keeping the school clean and safe and at ensuring that students take pride in their school. He is always friendly and welcoming and works hard at building positive relationships with the students, which builds community and creates a culture of well-being. Jeff takes advantage of learning opportunities for students, helping them understand the importance of keeping the school and grounds clean." In support of North Hastings High School teacher Jennifer Burbidge, Leaf Worsley, a fellow teacher at NHHS wrote: "Jen Burbidge has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to student safety and well-being through her innovative initiatives both within and beyond the classroom. In the classroom, Jen prioritizes meaningful relationships with her students, she creates a nurturing and supportive learning environment where every individual feels valued and empowered to excel. She was an early adopter of learning inventories and she was instrumental in its implementation with all staff. I'm not sure if students will remember how to conjugate verbs in French, but they will forever remember the feeling of safety and support around Mme. Burbidge." Reflecting on the award and what it means to her personally, Burbidge told Bancroft this Week: "Winning this award reinforces my commitment to fostering an inclusive and supportive environment, ensuring that everyone in our school community can thrive and succeed." Offering advice for anyone, she added, "If you're considering a career in education, know that it's a path filled with both challenges and immense rewards. I believe that it is vital to your well-being to identify the aspects of teaching that you love, whether it's a particular subject, age group, or activity. These passions will help sustain you through challenging times and keep your enthusiasm alive." Winners from the rest of the Hastings and Prince Edward district include: Lise Lindenberg, secondary teacher, Eastside Secondary School; Jeff McDougall, secondary teacher, Trenton High School; Laurie Spencer, secondary teacher, Prince Edward Collegiate Institute; and, Heather Yearwood, learning partner, Education Centre.