

Local nurse receives prestigious award



By Bill Kilpatrick

Former North Hastings resident and Nurse Practitioner Clarissa Townsend has always felt a calling to work with people. It was this drive and desire to make a difference in people's lives that led her into the field of medicine where she has been fulfilling this life-long calling ever since. "I've always wanted to give back to people," stated Townsend, "I like being able to see where you've impacted people's lives. I think that's really important. [I asked myself] 'what profession can do that?' and I choose nursing." To sum up all of Townsend's accomplishments in the field of health sciences would be impossible in one article as her resume is an astounding five pages long. Some of her main achievements include a Registered Nurse diploma from Sir Sanford Fleming College in 1997, a Bachelor of Science in nursing from Lakehead University in 2004, along with a Master of Science in aging and health from Queen's University in 2022. She has taught as an adjunct professor at Queen's, a professor at Brock University and Loyalist College, and is currently a professor and seminar leader at Trent University's School of Nursing. She worked in Bancroft as a Nurse Practitioner for the last 18 years, reluctantly leaving in 2022 for a job at the Kawartha Cariology Clinic, because she said that she needed a change. "It was sad to leave my community that I've always given back to, and it was hard to leave my patients, but I think we all need a change to refocus and regroup," she lamented. Townsend took the job running the vascular optimization clinic at the Kawartha Cardiology Clinic and she threw herself into the role 100 per cent. As a result of her hard work and dedication to patient well-being, on Sept. 25 at a special ceremony she was awarded the 2024 Nurse Practitioners of Ontario's Boehringer Ingelheim Award for her contribution and innovation in improving patient care. The award also comes with a monetary prize of \$2,500. The award recognizes clinical excellence, leadership, interprofessional practice, and management innovation in the applicant's clinical area. It is given out annually to one nurse practitioner in Ontario who works with people who have chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, diabetes, or heart failure. In this case Townsend received the award for her work with patients who have experienced heart failure, specifically her work creating and implementing the vascular optimization program. According to information provided by Townsend the program uses a "multidimensional approach" to treatment for hypertension, dyslipidemia (cholesterol management), and diabetes, which, while adhering to best practices, also incorporated self-directed care. Townsend has found that through education of patients concerning their conditions, their disease trajectory, and their medication, that they have "optimized outcomes" while creating high quality care. Dr. Michelle Acorn, Chief Executive Officer of the Nurse Practitioners of Ontario said that Townsend's work not only "demonstrates true excellence in leadership, clinical work, and interprofessional practice," but that

Nurse Practitioners like Clarissa are a powerful reminder of the ways in which nurse practitioners act as leaders in healthcare and in their communities. Townsend, who did not even know that she had been nominated for the award, was humbled and honored to receive the award stating, "How did this even happen? There are so many other nurse practitioners that do many amazing things. They work so hard and are trailblazers? I was just completely in awe." Townsend spent much of the conversation speaking about issues that nurse practitioners and patients are facing in Ontario, and when asked about her contribution to making this better and what contributed to her award she responded, "I'm not very good at tooting my own horn. I'm just a person who wants to do good and I just want to see people cared for. I just want people to know that I care." Helping people is not Townsend's only motivation to do good however, she spoke about how important it is for her to be a good role model for her daughter Avila. "I want to make change. I want to make an impression. I want my daughter to be proud of who I am. I want my daughter to see me as a role model and to see that we as women can make changes; we can challenge ourselves; we can be independent; we can be what ever we want." Townsend continues to succeed at all of her goals, but admits that there is still a lot of work that needs to be done. When asked what has been one of the biggest factors that has continued to motivate her, she pointed to her role models, her parents, Linda and Larry Coe. "I was raised by two amazing parents who always gave back to people," she said, "and they lived a very modest life and I just wanted to be able to do that." When reached for comment Linda and Larry both spoke of how proud they were at Townsend's achievements adding, "We've always brought our kids up that if somebody needed help you help them? She's amazing and she's worked hard to get where she is." Townsend continues to work at the Kawartha Cardiology Clinic helping those who have experienced heart failure.