

## Young leaders making a mark on the world

Tanya Kostiw, Special To The Beaver

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Vivian Leung seems like an average 16-year-old girl. She likes to jog and cook, watches *House* and *Grey's Anatomy*, and reads *Harry Potter*.

But she also loves volunteer work. Over the past two years, Leung has done everything from organize initiatives to raise money for Sichuan earthquake victims, HIV/AIDS in Africa, a well in Haiti and pencils for students in Niger. She volunteers at St. John's Ambulance, the hospital, Rotary Club and the Oakville Youth Advisory Committee and tutors a young boy.

But, you'll never hear her boast.

"She is not one to take credit or brag about herself or have an ego, and that's probably why she gets so much done," said Robin Mednick, who worked with Leung on the pencils project. "It's not important to her who gets the credit. It's important that the job gets done."

Leung received one of 12 Ontario Junior Citizen of the Year Awards for her community involvement.

"I hope through this, I'll continue to help others and continue to raise awareness about more causes," she said.

One of her recent projects was the Pencils for Kids initiative. She met Mednick, the organization's president at a leadership conference where Mednick described a trip to Niger and how she witnessed a class of 30 students share one pencil.

"It really stuck with me," said Leung, a Grade 11 student, who went back to Abbey Park High School and kicked off a campaign that raised \$1,500 for the cause. Her efforts inspired a local businessman to donate more than 19,000 pencils to the charity.

This contribution, according to Mednick, was due to Leung's "extraordinary energy to enthuse an entire student body."

"I think teamwork plays a key role in the success of anything," said Leung.

The relief campaign for the Sichuan earthquake drew in many students from various groups.

Leung recalls opening a newspaper and seeing a photograph of a soldier carrying a number of schoolbags from a building. Each schoolbag represented a child who had died.



**Young leaders making a mark on the world. JUNIOR LEADERS:** Ontario Junior Citizen of the Year award winner Vivian Leung, left, along with nominees Jack Yeilding and Laura McVey receive their OCNA Junior Citizen of the Year nomination certificates from The Oakville Beaver's Managing Editor Rod Jerred.

RIZIERO VERTOLLI / OAKVILLE BEAVER

The photo inspired her high school's Great Wall of Hope. Students purchased \$2 paper pandas, signed their name and put them on the wall. Leung also organized a raffle draw, appealing to Asian restaurants in the community for donations. Altogether, more than \$2,000 was raised.

Amanda McKenzie is Leung's school friend and self-proclaimed "sidekick" on some of the projects.

"She's (Leung) an incredible leader in the school and the world," McKenzie said. "She's done a lot of work not only for the community, but for the world."

Mednick said Leung stands out because she follows through on ideas and is action-oriented.

"She is such a leader and a visionary."

Mednick supported Leung's nomination, which was initiated by her former principal Odette Bartnicki.

On the nomination form, Bartnicki wrote, "I can honestly say that Vivian is the most amazing and accomplished young woman I have ever met ... there will never be a better candidate for this award."

Leung hopes to study medicine and work for Doctors Without Borders. She would like to visit some of the countries where she has already made a difference and continue to help on a ground level.

"This is a girl who will change the world," said Mednick. "It's a rare combination to find someone who has no agenda other than to do good."

"She has a heart of gold," Mackenzie said, "and she'll definitely use that heart to change the world."

Two other Oakville youths were among the 117 nominees for the Ontario Junior Citizens of the Year Awards.

Laura McVey, 16, was nominated by her mother, Janice McVey. In the nomination, her mom quoted Martin Luther King Jr. to describe her daughter, "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."

Laura is involved in many activities, including being a student trustee for the Halton District School Board.

"I'm focusing on bringing the student voice to the board table," she said.

The awards program also recognized Jack Yeilding, an Oakville boy with a severe type of epilepsy. Named Canada's Youngest Philanthropist by *Maclean's* magazine, six-year-old Jack set up a lemonade stand in spring 2007 to raise money for Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children. After inspiring the community, his plight to support the hospital gained national recognition and more than \$70,000 has been raised.

Leung and the 11 other finalists are invited to an awards ceremony at Queen's Park on March 3.