

Inspired leadership has potential to change the world

By Christina Commisso
METROLAND WEST MEDIA GROUP

Inspired leadership is needed to change the world, local high school students heard during last Wednesday's Halton Industry Education Council (HIEC) event.

Neil Hetherington, CEO of Habitat for Humanity Toronto, was the keynote speaker at the annual Breakfast with the Mayors. Hetherington used his own experiences of building homes around the world to inspire the 30 students in attendance.

"To come together, what we need more than anything else is inspired leadership," he said. "Everybody can be part of it."

Hetherington left his job at Tridel, Canada's largest condo developer, to lead Habitat Humanity Toronto — becoming the youngest

Habitat CEO in the world. Since that time, the organization has gone from building one house every two years to 84 in 2009.

"I remember cutting the ribbon of a home of a widow living with four children. It was a simple, decent, affordable brick structure. The family crossed a threshold into a new future, one of hope and dignity," he recalled. "That's when I developed Habititas — an addiction to Habitat. Putting all the community's effort into one extraordinary feat and breaking the cycle of poverty."

He said having the family help with the construction of their own home builds a sense of self worth and dignity.

"When you serve the poor, it's important to serve them in a dignified way."

Hetherington told the story of building a home alongside a blind woman.

"Her friend was directing her and she was putting on siding, she was on the scaffolding and using the chop saw by herself. That is inspired leadership. That is what we need. That's what your educators are producing — inspiring youth to go out and do something that's common sense and changing the world, because it's radically needed."

Hetherington was asked about his favourite memory of Habitat, but he was hard-pressed to narrow it down to one.

"The first one happened 11 years ago next week. I walked into an illegal basement apartment with no windows that was 250 square feet. A family of five lived there for eight years and that evening I had the awesome privilege of handing them a letter saying you've been approved for Habitat for Humanity home."

He continued, "Driving by home you had a

hand in building, and seeing a Christmas tree or a light on, you know they did it on their own, they've broken the cycle of poverty."

This year's event marked the second experiential learning week, which honours employers who have helped arm students with real world experience and students who have benefited from co-op education, job shadowing or mentoring.

The event, held at Milton's Rattlesnake Point Golf Club, showcased the work of a several specialist high skills students.

Six culinary students helped out in the kitchen to prepare breakfast, family skills students at Bishop Reding high school prepared complimentary cookies, which were packaged by life skills students, and Notre Dame high school's horticultural students created the event's centerpieces.

Inside

Opinion.....	6
Travel.....	22
Health.....	24
Sports.....	25
Classified.....	29

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Continued from page 1
ground floor.

Gilgan, who has two sons who graduated from Ryerson and two more currently attending, said he fondly recalls attending games and concerts at the Gardens while growing up in Toronto.

"This is a tremendous urban facility that we have here," Gilgan told a news conference at ice level of the new arena.

"This building, when it opens in the spring, is going to be a major celebration for the city and a major celebration for Ryerson."

The Oakville YMCA bears Gilgan's name and through his company, the local resident has donated \$10 million to the new Oakville hospital and will have the hospital's inpatient tower named the Peter Gilgan Patient Care Centre.

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