

Kawartha Lakes nominates the unsung heroes of COVID-19

Sarah Sobanski Kawartha Lakes This Week

News

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Kawartha Lakes has come together over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Kawartha Lakes This Week reached out on social media to hear from you about who's helped the helpers, and gone out of their way to help the community get through one of the longest year's in recent memory.

Here's who you nominated as the area's unsung heroes.

Dean Burke, principal at King Albert Public School



Ashley Vatcher writes, "The principal at King Albert, Dean Burke. He gave a lot to his students and their families from groceries to clothing and school help. He has gone above and beyond to help every student under his wing. He truly wants each student to feel safe, loved and cared for."

Dean Burke, principal at King Albert Public School, has spent the pandemic finding creative ways to support hungry families in need.

“We’re a school that services the community by feeding kids,” Burke says, noting he and staff mobilized to continue supporting 13 families in need when schools shut down.

Burke says families are often able to prepare for the March Break gap, but they rely on the school’s Friday soup days and nutrition program. He says when COVID-19 hit, he knew they’d be needed as some single-income families lost their jobs to the pandemic and government supports weren’t immediately available.

With the help of community partners, such as the Boys and Girls Club, Burke and his staff were able to support families through to the end of the school year and through the summer with gift cards for grocery carts until school could return.

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Since the school year has started up again, the school has also been able to connect families in need with winter wear.

“Its so funny that people are saying me, it should really say the King Albert staff,” Burke notes, giving a shout out to Gr. 1/2 teacher Meghan Park who was making sure kids had books to read through the summer and Shawn Wright, who is a contact point for anyone who needs help.

Angela Earhart, Lindsay resident



Tyler Miller writes, “Angela Earhart worked her butt off sewing custom face coverings during the outbreak, free of charge. She’s always doing something to help others... She deserves some recognition.” Earhart was nominated multiple times by half a dozen local residents.

Angela Earhart, a Lindsay local, estimates she’s sewn and donated “at least” 20,000 masks since the pandemic started. She says at first her daughter had just told her someone needed a mask, but that quickly turned into an 18-hour a day job.

“I made one and said, ‘Hey, this is easy,’” she says. “I was getting messages from the jail and hospitals... I was making 100 masks a day.”

Earhart is a natural networker who finds she’s often helping members of the community get what they need. She and her friend, Joe Morrin, do a lot of fundraising together. She credits another friend, Amanda Holmes, with helping them stay organized through their work.

“She’s the brains, he’s the professionalism and I’ve got the resources,” she says.

Leading up to Christmas, the trio put together Christmas stockings for seniors, and when they spoke with Kawartha Lakes This Week, they were heading into a charity raffle hosted on their weeknight radio show on [ClubConnection.club](https://www.clubconnection.club). They’d also just wrapped up a draw that raised \$2,500 for autism support organizations.

Earhart attributes her sense of community, and want to give back, to a woman who supported her when she says she was an addict.

“She really taught me a lot, and she never turned away from me,” she says, noting she’s been clean for a decade now. She says now she does “whatever it takes” to help.

Julie Milne, community paramedic with Kawartha Lakes Paramedic Service



Julie Milne was nominated by Kawartha Lakes This Week as the face of a Kawartha Lakes Paramedic Service program that has proved invaluable during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since the program started in 2019, Julie Milne, community paramedic, has had anywhere from 40 to 50 patients on her roster at all times. She says some of those patients are regulars, some only need a handful of visits until they can move on, but she ends up connecting with all of them.

“I love it. You have good days and bad days with everything. I put a lot into my work, it never shuts off,” she says, noting she’s always on-call for anyone of her patients from check-in to emergency.

“It’s almost like I’ve adopted 80 sets of grandparents,” she says, adding that’s fitting as she didn’t grow up with any.

Milne has been integral to pandemic efforts as patients are fearful of leaving their homes due to the virus and more isolated than ever. She says sometimes it’s just about going in, saying, “Hello,” and granting that piece of mind.

Milne also helps patients keep out of the hospital — critical in a time when the province worries about overwhelming the healthcare system. She says she helps patients with problems that are easily diagnosed and helps them get their prescriptions filled without having to go to the doctor.

Born and raised in Scotland, Milne has been in Kawartha Lakes with her family for almost two decades. Paramedicine is her second career. She started as a medical assistant and worked with a doctor who helped her overcome her visceral reaction to stitches and needles.

She’s now the paramedic service’s main flu shot administer. She’s done more than 200 shots through nearly a dozen roving clinics this year.

Jason Ward, owner and lawyer at Wards Lawyer PC



Carrie Robinson writes, “Jason Ward did an amazing job on social media of keeping our community informed, answering everyone’s questions, and providing vital information. He really stood out as a true leader when we needed one the most.”

Jason Ward, owner and lawyer at Wards Lawyer PC, has been posting informational pieces for area residents on [his blog](#), two to three times a week for the past six years. When the pandemic hit he went into overdrive, sometimes posting up to 10 times a day.

The amount of information coming out about the pandemic, but also from upper levels of government on legislation and support programs for the pandemic, was overwhelming, Ward explains. The need for someone to decipher it into what it meant for residents of a small, rural area like Kawartha Lakes quickly became apparent.

Ward says he had the skills, resources and political connections to become a touch point for understanding new business, employee and support mandates. He says he saw an opportunity to give back to the community.

“It was a very challenging experience to take this giant ball of information and just weed through it,” he says, noting he’s answered more than 5,000 emails from residents and countless questions on social media.

“Really it was incumbent on my firm just to do this for the community because there was so much that we didn’t understand.”

Ward has also participated in virtual conferences and seminars to help community members better understand the chaos of the pandemic. He still gets lots of inquiries and he says his firm’s social media presence has taken off.

Mike Kleinhuis, pastor for Centre Community Church



Susan Lamoureux writes, “King Albert Public School, Dean Burke, for providing essential items during the lockdown, and pastor Mike Kleinhuis from the Centre Community Church, for providing essential items throughout the summer. These two outstanding people made sure families had essential items delivered weekly during these uncertain times.”

Mike Kleinhuis, pastor for [Centre Community Church](#), says he started the church in Lindsay five years ago looking to spread the love of Jesus in an inclusive way. Whatever religion, or status, he says he wanted to be there to help.

That work has continued through the pandemic; a time when connecting with people is more important than ever. The church has built connections with people in need in the south end of Lindsay through community partnerships, such as with Kawartha Food Source and the United Way.

“When the pandemic hit, we knew that food security would be an issue, so we reached out to them to see if there would be a need,” he says. “It was never just a quick, here’s your groceries, bye.”

He and David Easson, church intern, provided grocery pickups, helped people get to important appointments and just stopped to talk with people to help manage their mental health if they were feeling overwhelmed by the pandemic.

“There’s a lot of single parent families who’ve struggled with addictions in the past, and it’s easy to fall back into old habits,” he says. “Really [we’re] just trying to show them that they’re not alone, and show them there are people who care.”

When people couldn’t attend church, they’d take written devotionals to them. They’ve also been adding videos to services now that they’re back to keep people connected.

Jill Wickins, operations link for Compass Early Learning and Care for Kawartha Lakes



Sandi Ashton writes, "Compass Early Learning and Care for providing childcare to families throughout the pandemic so many educators and support staff helped our front line and essential workers go to work knowing their children were safe and well taken care of."

Kawartha Lakes This Week spoke with Sandi Aston, registered early childhood educator, and her co-worker, Marsha Matson, culture and admin lead, for [Compass's Lindsay program](#) at St. Dominic Catholic Secondary School. They nominated Jill Wickins.

"This woman is really the unsung hero behind everything," Matson says. "Without her we wouldn't be able to do it."

"We just thought that Jill has done so much, for not only her bravery, but her taking those chances and thinking about all the things she's done for us during that time," Aston says.

Matson and Aston explain Wickins is the woman working behind the scenes to ensure everyone at Compass is up to date on policy and health changes, training and has their personal protective equipment.

Compass has been sending home journals and videos to parents so they can be a part of their experience, even if they can't come in and join them due to COVID-19 protocols. They've also created a database of photos for parents.

Wickins has spearheaded these initiatives and been at the forefront of making sure everyone is confident, from parents to educators, Aston says. Her depth of knowledge on childcare policy is hard to match.

"There's over 400 employees, this woman is a hero," Matson adds.