

Family and friends, buddies and the Bruins help celebrate Citizen of the Year, Blake Burnett

Immediate Release: November 8, 2019

Blake Burnett is a guy who does not seek the spotlight, so when he was honoured as the 34th Citizen of the Year Nov. 6, he brought his team with him.

Burnett's wife Charlene, four daughters - Alyssa, Amanda, Nicole, Amy, along with mom - Marlene, friends and his buddies on the East Selkirk Fire Department were all there to support Blake.

And there in spirit, of course, was Burnett's beloved Boston Bruins.

Almost every gift the lifelong St. Clements resident received on his special night involved the Bruins – from an actual letter of congratulations from the team to a spectacular framed, autographed picture of team legends Phil Esposito and Johnny Bucyk –and it was the way it should have been.

“Knowing I had to make a speech tonight I thought I'd make a quick thank you and get back to my comfy spot beside the bar. But Charlene told me I had to but that it was my night and I could get away with wearing my hat, which makes me feel a lot more comfortable,” said a Bruins-ball-cap-wearing Burnett during a wonderful acceptance speech that was as honest, funny and humble as the man himself obviously is.

“But at the same time I know it's probably driving my mom nuts. ‘Blake, no hats at the dinner table,’ I bet you I heard that a thousand times.”

The hat stayed on and Burnett thanked his wife and girls, his new grandson – who had to go home early because the night went on past his bedtime – and of course his mom, whom he said was the one who really deserved an award.

“It's difficult for me to accept an award like this when there's a person like my mom sitting in the crowd,” he said, emotion wringing from his voice.

“You don't realize growing up. She's the reason for me having the work ethic and pride in my community. Growing up, there wasn't a team or a sport or a club my mom wouldn't let me and my brothers and sister join. And there was seven of us...Mom, thanks for showing me the way.”



Burnett was grinning from ear to ear when he received a photo of his beloved Boston Bruins at the award dinner for the 2019 Citizen of the Year.

Besides working at Canada Post and the East Selkirk Rec Centre, Burnett has been a volunteer firefighter on the East Selkirk Fire Department for years. He was happy to sign up, but admitted, he had no idea what he was getting into.

“About 17 years ago, a buddy of mine called me and asked me if I was interested in joining the East Selkirk Fire Department. So I talked it over with Charlene and she said, ‘well, you're pretty busy now, but it's up to you. So if you want to go ahead’. So I figured ‘why not?’” he said to much laughter.

“How much time could that possibly take?”

He soon realized how valuable and necessary volunteer firefighters are when in his first year the department responded to 130 calls.

Earlier in the night, Burnett squirmed in his seat as family, friends and colleagues got up to pay tribute to the man of the evening.

St. Clements Mayor Debbie Fiebelkorn, who along with the rest of council, nominated Burnett for the award, said Burnett is a most deserving recipient of the Citizen of the Year award, for his endless dedication to the community.

“When I think of Blake, it seems I have known him forever, from the time I was involved with figure skating and hockey at the East Selkirk Rec Center when he was starting his career,” she said.

“I'd like to thank you for all your hard work and dedication on behalf of myself, members of council both past and present, municipal staff, everyone that is here to celebrate and all those people who have used the rec facilities.”

Long time friend and mentor Rod Cameron paid tribute to his friend, and made sure he told stories that turned his friend's cheeks a bright shade of red.

“Blake thank you very much for asking me to come up here. I've always, and you know this, thought of you as a little brother. And I stick to my rules, I don't lend money to relatives,” Cameron joked.

Burnett's daughters shared the stage to talk about their dad, his commitment to the community and his incredible work ethic. They marvelled at their dad's “level of kindness,” and “patience, living with five girls.”

Aaron Martyniw, Chair of the SDCF, presented Burnett with the award, and said it was one of the perks of his position to be able to deliver good news to people like Burnett. And he said the call to Burnett will stick with him.

“That call will always be memorable to me. One, for the genuine humility and shock after saying congratulations, you are the 2019 Citizen of the Year, there was awkward silence,” Martyniw said to laughter.

“And then I certainly exacerbated the issue by mentioning, ‘oh, and you get to be in a parade.’”

Burnett thanked everyone and especially the SDCF, for all the good work they do in the community.

Congratulations to Blake Burnett, whose next appearance as the Citizen of the Year will be at the Selkirk Parade, July 2020.

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