

Nominations for Citizen of the Year open; deadline Oct. 1

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Michele Polinuk, Blake Burnett and Bob Hebert have something in common – they’re all recipients of the Citizen of the Year Award, sponsored by the Selkirk & District Community Foundation.

Polinuk was last year’s award winner, Burnett in 2019 and Hebert took the honours in 2018.

This year’s award winner will be the 36th Citizen of the Year, and those who’ve come before are demonstrative of the varying backgrounds each and every one of them has.

The last three winners show perfectly that the Citizen of the Year is not a clone of every other winner.

Polinuk is a retired educator and a former superintendent of the Lord Selkirk School Division; Burnett is a Canada Post employee who also works at the East Selkirk Rec Centre and is a long-time St. Clements volunteer firefighter; and Hebert, who lives with an intellectual disability, works part-time and volunteers more than full-time.

“We can take a look back at all the recipients of this award and see that being the Citizen of the Year isn’t open to a select few, it is open to everyone,” said Bev Clegg, SDCF Executive Director.

“The people who go above and beyond for the community come from all walks of life but have that commonality of a good spirit, a kind heart and the desire to pitch in for the betterment of all.”

Polinuk learned from her parents that volunteering is important and she admitted that it’s in her nature to lend a hand.

“I don’t say no very often,” Polinuk laughed.

“And the problem with me is that I don’t know what a little bit is. I go all in. I can’t just do a little bit, I have to be all in, be all involved.”



Michele Polinuk reacts to the surprise appearance of friends and supporters – who came bearing gifts for the 2020 Citizen of the Year, while she was being interviewed about the award.

Burnett also credited his mom with instilling a community-minded work ethic in him, and during his acceptance speech gave credit to his wife and daughters and his mom.

"It's difficult for me to accept an award like this when there's a person like my mom sitting in the crowd," Burnett 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 sisters join. And there was seven of us...Mom, thanks for showing me the way."

Hebert accepted his 2018 award with the same enthusiasm he brings to everything he does, and he let the crowd in attendance at his big night know how much the recognition meant to him.

"When I heard I was chosen for this award, I was shocked. I didn't think this would happen to someone like me, someone with an intellectual disability," Hebert said during his rousing acceptance speech.

"But I know that a person with an intellectual disability can do anything they want if they put their mind to it. There's no such word as can't, and don't you forget it."

Deadline for nominations for the 2021 Citizen of the year is Oct. 1.

Like last year, this year's Citizen of the Year will be celebrated through a series of videos highlighting their commitment to community. An awards banquet will not take place.

The Citizen of the Year Award recognizes an individual, who through their own initiative, ability and effort has made an exemplary achievement in the area of the RM of St. Andrews, RM of St. Clements and/or the City of Selkirk.

Nominators should explain how the individual you are nominating has made the community a better place to live and work; provide a detailed account of the individual's volunteer contributions and/or professional accomplishments, as they relate to the community; and describe how the individual's actions have impacted and helped the community.

Written nominations are welcome from any individual, organization, business, association or institution and can be dropped off at the Selkirk & District Community Foundation office at 200 Eaton Ave., to the attention of the Citizen of the Year Selection Committee, or e-mailed to selkirkfoundation@shaw.ca.

For more information, contact 204-785-9755 or email exdirector@sdcf.ca

The Selkirk and District Community Foundation is a charitable organization that provides financial support to charitable causes and agencies in the region, which includes Selkirk, St. Andrews and St. Clements. Gifts from donors enable the Foundation to support countless groups and individuals in our community. The Foundation has given in excess of \$3.4 million to more than 125 local charities and community organizations during its 25 years. For more details contact SDCF Executive Director Bev Clegg at 204.785.9755.