

GOLDEN STAR AWARDS

PLANTING INTERGENERATIONAL PROMISES: GOLDEN STAR AWARDS 2022



UPPER SUMAS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - ABBOTSFORD

Debbie Mar and her grade 3 class at Upper Sumas Elementary School hit the double jackpot this year. They amply met all the criteria for a BCRTA Golden Star Award as well as qualifying for the Golden Star Legion Award. Debbie and her students were presented with the Golden Star/Legion Award for 2022 at a joyful celebration on June 9.

“Planting Intergenerational Promises” is a well-established programme bringing together students and seniors, including veterans. Upper Sumas Elementary was at “ground zero” during last year’s catastrophic floods, so staff and students had to move out of their building for several months, yet still managed to carry on their core activities.

Ms. Mar, 2020 recipient of a 2020 *Prime Minister’s Award for Teaching Excellence*, began connecting students and seniors through tulip and daffodil bulbs in 2019 with the start of the “Tulip Project”. Tulip bulbs supplied by B.C. Agriculture in the Classroom (BCAITC) became a means of celebrating the Liberation of Holland in 1945. Seniors, including veterans from the Abbotsford Legion, were drawn to the project as students began an in-depth study of the role of Canadian soldiers in that event. Veterans now play key roles in the annual classroom Remembrance Day commemorations.

As students began to educate the community about the special friendship between Canada and the Netherlands, their powerful voices and engaging presentations captured the attention of the community. Many seniors became involved and shared their gifts. Students were



Students and guests enjoyed a celebratory cake.



Veterans were among those to celebrate the presentation of the Golden Star/Legion Award at Upper Sumas Elementary.

invited to Seaforth Armoury as guests of honour to receive the “Boots of Remembrance” Award and meet World War II veterans.

Debbie’s liaison with Josh Burton, supervisor of Archway Senior Services in Abbotsford, helped make the programme a well-known presence connecting students and seniors in the community.

Students and seniors connected with one another through creating gifts of art and poetry for each other. These intergenerational connections resulted in a presentation of “daffodil poetry”, an event of special significance since the school’s daffodil bed had been covered by four feet of water during the flooding. Quoting Christine Lawe, a favourite writer, Debbie says, “Flowers are lovely to look at, but more importantly they’re a tool to kick-start a conversation and foster a connection”.

Debbie’s project also led to an invitation by the Dutch Liberation Society to write lessons on connecting the bulbs to seniors.

This project is close to Debbie’s heart as an integral part of her curriculum:



ABOVE: Students share their flower art and poetry with their senior friends during the presentation of The Golden Star/Legion Award at Upper Sumas Elementary School on June 9th. BELOW: Steve Bailey and Amber Stewart present the Golden Star cheque, trophy and certificate To Ms. Debbie Mar and her grade 3 class at Upper Sumas Elementary.

“Students love important work. Engagement is high and they benefit from the gifts that seniors bring into our classroom. Students are effortlessly meeting many of the competencies for their grade while making a long-lasting difference in their community. Critical thinking, deep discussions, and the cultivation of empathy and compassion through shared experiences make me so proud to be my students’ teacher. I will never forget the absolute joy on each student’s face as they opened their package from their senior—a painted flower just for them and a story of why it is special.”



The BCRTA was represented at June 9’s presentation by Steve Bailey, Excellence Committee Chair, and Gloria Adam, president of the Abbotsford RTA Branch, as well as other RTA members from Abbotsford. Seniors from the community and their student friends read their poetry and shared their art. Amber Stewart of the Legion Foundation of the B.C. and Yukon Command represented the Legion and presented Debbie and her students with a cheque for \$1500 which will go toward the continuation of “Planting Intergenerational Promises”. Also attending was Adriana Zylmans, President of the 2020 Dutch Liberation Celebration and a retired teacher. Pat Tonn, Executive Director of BCAITC, represented that organization, and Josh Burton spoke of the strong relationship between the school and seniors in the community. Retired Sergeant Kelly Watson, Vice President of the Abbotsford Legion, spoke of his personal joy at being part of this initiative.

The Excellence in Public Education Committee is looking forward to next year’s Golden Star Award submissions. The deadline for submissions is April 15, 2023. BCRTA members are urged to encourage projects in their area that are intergenerational in nature to apply. Projects must be on-going and show evidence of the development of meaningful relationships between school students and seniors in their community.

Application criteria, and past Golden Star and Golden Star/Legion Award winners, can be found on the BCRTA website, at <https://bcрта.ca/bcрта-golden-star-awards/>

STEVE BAILEY is Chair of BCRTA’s Excellence in Public Education Committee