

Celebrating alumni excellence at York University's 2015 Bryden Alumni Awards

Even with a resume that includes Cirque Du Soleil, roles in Hollywood movies and traveling the world as one of Canada's top break-dancers – all before finishing high school – Michael Prosserman says that York was where his journey began. "The University was an important stepping stone for me to achieve my dreams. I'm so proud to be a York alumnus."

And he is not alone in that red-and-white pride. Prosserman was just one of four outstanding grads recognized at the 2015 Bryden Alumni Awards in front of hundreds of their fellow York alumni, families, friends, faculty, staff and students.

The 15th annual Bryden Awards were held on Thursday, Nov. 19 at the Royal Ontario Museum. The evening was sponsored by TD Insurance Meloche Monnex, MBNA MasterCard and Manulife, and was hosted by York grad, previous Bryden recipient and former CityTV/CTV news anchor Galit Solomon (BA '00). Nearly 300 guests attended the event and were treated to performances by pianist Mark Herrera, The Intentions! and The Liam Stanley Trio, featuring current York student Liam Stanley at the helm.

"This is an event I look forward to every year — and it is certainly one of the University's most anticipated events," President and Vice-Chancellor Mamdouh Shoukri said as he welcomed the evening's guests. "The Bryden Awards are an opportunity for all of us in the York community to come together to recognize the incredible impact our graduates are having on the world. As our current and future students work toward realizing their own dreams for the future, the exceptional examples set by this year's honourees offer proof that the possibilities after York are endless."

And as each of the 2015 Bryden recipients took to the stage to accept their awards, it was evident that they are each putting their York University education into action to impact, transform and improve our community in unique and progressive ways.

The One to Watch award recognizes a relatively recent grad for their remarkable early achievements and eagerly anticipated future successes, something Michael Prosserman (BAS '08) was clearly doing long before even setting foot at York. But his impact has only intensified since graduation.

As founder and executive director of UNITY Charity, Prosserman and his team reach over 60,000 youth each year across Canada, empowering them to become positive and influential leaders in priority communities using hip-hop as a vehicle for change. The organization was spawned out of his own personal story of expressing stress and originally began as a student club at York – a club that still exists to this day. "I stand here on this stage representing an army

of people who have helped me to get here tonight. I'm not accepting this award...WE are accepting this award."

Tentanda Via award recipient Gail McVey (BA '85, MA '89, PhD '95), who was recognized for having demonstrated innovative, unconventional and daring leadership and successes and for living York's motto of "the way must be tried", shared what helped her to be successful.

"My recipe for success is comprised of three key features. The first is a strong foundation, which I was got from my education and experiences at York. Next are the essential ingredients, including a collaborative approach to my research and my practice. Finally, the icing on the cake is all of the incredible people you get to meet along the way, including everyone here tonight."

As Canada's foremost eating disorder prevention researcher, Gail McVey is an internationally recognized expert in prevention science and its application to mental health interventions at all stages of life. Currently, McVey is a psychologist and health systems research scientist at The Hospital for Sick Children, with an appointment as a senior associate scientist with the Research Institute. She is also director of the Ontario Community Outreach Program for Eating Disorders, a community-based clinical training program in evidence-based treatment and prevention of eating disorders, where she led the development of a first-of-its-kind provincial network of specialized eating disorder service providers.

And while some recipients were recognized for their contributions on the national stage, Outstanding Contribution award recipient Douglas Bergeron (BA '83, Hon. LLD '13) was celebrated for his impact right here at York.

A 25-year veteran of the financial technology industry currently serving as founder and CEO of Opus Global and executive chairman of Hiperos, Bergeron has been a long-time supporter of York University. Along with his wife Sandra, he made a record-breaking \$10-million gift to the York in 2014, which at the time was the largest donation ever to the University by an alumnus. In recognition of this exceptional and continued support from the Bergeron family, the recently completed home of the Lassonde School of Engineering has been named the Bergeron Centre for Engineering Excellence.

"The nature of education is changing – over the next several decades, it will become a more iterative, collaborative and group-minded experience and I think the new Bergeron Centre was constructed with that in mind. I'm confident the Centre will help to create some phenomenal Renaissance Engineers who will go out and change the world."

The last award of the evening was the Outstanding Achievement award, presented to a graduate who has achieved distinction in their field and whose integrity and ability inspires alumni, faculty, staff and students. And this year, there was no more fitting recipient than Bruce

Lourie (MES '87), president of the Ivey Foundation and a pioneering environmental leader known for confronting issues related to health and sustainability.

"Without hesitation, York University was a truly a mind-opening educational experience," Lourie exclaimed of his alma mater. "The amazing thing about York was being exposed to new skills and different ways of thinking that I never thought I'd need, like communications or politics, but now are what I care about most in my career. It's important to always ask questions, challenge biases and stick to your instincts when tackling important issues, and that is what York taught me to do."

Committed to connecting environmental issues to human health, Lourie initiated the campaign to shutdown coal-fired power plants in Ontario — the single largest climate action in North America. He also helped convene the Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement, one of the world's largest conservation initiatives.

Among the guests in attendance were York Chancellor and two-time alumnus Gregory Sorbara as well as Vice-President Advancement Jeff O'Hagan, both of whom took to the stage to share their excitement with the night's recipients. "Like the Bryden recipients before them, our 2015 recipients encourage all of us to do our best, work hard and contribute to a better world," O'Hagan said. "Thank you and congratulations to all of our Bryden recipients – we hope that you've enjoyed the spotlight tonight because you deserve it!"

For the first time in the Bryden Awards' 15-year history, nearly 20 York student-leaders were also able to attend the celebration thanks to the generous sponsorship of our alumni guests. This new element of the Bryden Awards program reflects the University's strategic priority of connecting grads with the student body to ensure a highly active and engaged alumni family. One such student-leader in attendance was Anthony Brum, a third-year Glendon student currently completing his specialist honours degree in international studies. He shared with us why he was excited to attend this year's awards celebration and what the Bryden Awards program means to him as a current York student.

"The Bryden Awards gave me and my fellow students a unique opportunity to meet outstanding York alumni who truly did inspire us to think more about our futures. The trails that these award-winning grads have blazed were great examples of how, with a York degree under my belt, I can continue to push the envelope and create lasting, positive change for people, no matter what I decide to do. Though this was my first alumni event, it definitely inspired me to continue my active role in the York community after I graduate."

As the event came to a close, Randy Williamson, chair of the York University Alumni Association, congratulated this year's winners and turned everyone's thoughts towards next year's event. "Planning has already begun on next year's Alumni Awards and we'll need your help to discover other York grads from our growing community of nearly 300,000 alumni that deserve to be recognized."