



Rotary Club of West Ottawa *Paul Harris Fellow Award¹*

Conferred on Shawn Dawson, June 30, 2015

(The following text was read at the awards presentation ceremony)

Many of our Paul Harris Award recipients move mountains to get the job done. Our next honouree climbs them. Shawn Dawson is one of only 8 people in the world to have climbed the highest peaks on each of the 7 continents in under two years.

Feeling that his climbing expeditions would have more impact if they were associated with a more meaningful objective, Shawn established the Dream Mountains Foundation in 2011. So far it has raised more than \$700,000 for local charities. Beneficiaries have included *Habitat for Humanity, Dreams Take Flight, the Ottawa School Breakfast Program, the Prostate Cancer Ride for Dad, CARE Canada and the Ottawa Senators Foundation*. His goal is to have donated \$1 million by 2017.

This spring Shawn led a team of 21 climbers with the goal of reaching base camp on Mount Everest, which is at 17,500 feet. They were in Nepal when the massive earthquake hit on April 25, killing more than 6,000 people including many climbers and hikers. Fortunately, all his team members were unharmed. They raised more than \$150,000 for the Foundation. He asks each team member to pay their own expenses and raise at least \$5,000 for each climb, and most exceed the total without a problem. They know it will be an experience they will never forget and they, too, are anxious to donate to charity.

Shawn sees the climbs benefitting the charities but also changing the lives of the team members. Lifelong friendships are formed, and newfound confidence and inspiration often blossom during the expeditions.

Shawn has climbed his own mountain in his personal life. As a teen he was in trouble a lot and ended up in jail. A former gang member helped him turn his life around; Shawn tried the militia, riding bulls in the rodeo, and even became a karate champion.

Shawn has been a successful entrepreneur with interests in retail, real estate, restaurants and new media. At the age of 40 he was invited to climb Mount Kilimanjaro and after that he was hooked. He was volunteering for *Habitat for Humanity* in Ghana and was so impressed with the sense of community in those villages, that he wanted to be involved in something similar. As Ghandi said, Shawn wanted to "Be the change you want to see in the world". Shawn summed it up this way:

"I climbed Mount Everest by focusing on taking each step, not by focusing on the top of the mountain. Give a child the opportunity to attend school, a nutritious breakfast that allows her to focus on the lesson instead of her hunger, a stable home in which to do homework and water that won't make her ill - and you give that child the chance to succeed at climbing her own version of Everest."

Shawn has replicated the sense of community he saw in Ghana by helping so many local charities. He is an inspiration who truly is creating the Change that he wants to see in the world. The Rotary Club of West Ottawa thanks him for his community service and is honoured to bestow on him a Paul Harris Fellow Award. Shawn, please come forward to receive your Award.

¹ Named after the founder of Rotary International, the Paul Harris Fellow Recognition program was introduced by the trustees of the Rotary Foundation in 1957 to encourage donations to the Foundation. The Rotary Club of West Ottawa adopted the program to create the Club's *Paul Harris Fellow Award*. The award recognizes individuals who have given distinguished service that exemplifies the ideals and objectives of Rotary. To bestow the award, the Club makes a contribution of \$1,000 US to the Rotary Foundation in the name of the individual to be honoured; that individual is then named a *Paul Harris Fellow* by the Foundation.

A nominee for the award who is not a member of the Rotary Club of West Ottawa must meet at least one of four criteria to be named a Paul Harris Fellow. The nominee must: 1) have made an outstanding personal or business contribution that has significantly enhanced the welfare of the community at the local, national or international level; 2) have made an outstanding personal or business contribution that has significantly improved understanding and generated mutual respect between or among people of different races, cultures or countries; 3) have performed outstanding community service in support of youth, the elderly, the underprivileged, the disabled or the developmentally challenged; or 4) exemplify the qualities of the good citizen and provide a role model of the ideal community builder.