

Good afternoon, and welcome. It is my honour to stand before you today to introduce the Culture Connector Award, an award launched by the Local Immigration Partnership – Lanark & Renfrew Counties in 2023 as part of the Culture Connect initiative. The award celebrates and recognizes individuals and organizations in the Ottawa Valley who have shown exceptional dedication and support to newcomers in our community.

Before we introduce our recipients, I want to acknowledge that today's award presentation is happening on the unceded and unsundered territory of the Algonquin Peoples. Lanark County is working towards reconciliation; this acknowledgement is just a small reminder of that large commitment. With this in mind, we respectfully thank these Indigenous Peoples for hosting us on their ancestral lands. Miigwetch (thank you).

In a constantly changing and evolving world, we must come together to foster a sense of belonging and create a welcoming environment for those who have chosen Canada as their new home. The Culture Connector Award serves as a platform to acknowledge the outstanding efforts of those who have gone above and beyond to support newcomers, helping them adjust to their new lives in the Ottawa Valley.

This award is not simply about recognizing grand gestures or large-scale initiatives; it also celebrates the power of small acts of kindness that have a lasting impact on individuals and their families. It is about the compassion and empathy that extend beyond cultural differences, forging connections that transcend borders and enrich our collective experience.

Today, we have the privilege of honouring a remarkable individual who has made a significant difference in the lives of newcomers to the County.

George Yaremchuk [Yar-em-chuck], the deserving recipient of the Culture Connector award, has exemplified exceptional community spirit and humanitarian effort. A dedicated resident and serial volunteer of Almonte, George's commitment was profoundly evident during the onset of the Ukrainian invasion in 2022. Initially reaching out to him for personal support, a friend soon discovered George's ability to channel his emotional turmoil into a force for good. Despite the rawness of the situation, George's focus turned to proactive support for Ukrainian families seeking refuge in Canada. His extensive efforts included securing housing and employment and navigating the complex bureaucratic processes for Irina, her son, her mother, and other families. George's role as a translator, fundraiser, and all-around supporter has been invaluable, embodying selfless dedication. His quiet, persistent actions have also inspired others to contribute significantly to humanitarian efforts, notably through projects like the Sunflower Guitar initiative. George's unwavering support and inclusive nature, welcoming these families into his own, underscore his extraordinary contribution to fostering a compassionate and connected community.

Today, we celebrate the recipient of the Culture Connector Award, an individual whose actions have profoundly impacted the lives of newcomers. Through his efforts, George

has embraced the values of compassion, understanding, and cultural harmony, bridging divides and building a stronger, more inclusive community.

This year's one-of-a-kind Culture Connector award was created by Lenka Acreman, a talented ceramist. Born and raised in Slovakia, Lenka immigrated to Canada in 1997, bringing with her a rich heritage and a passion for the arts. Now a cherished artist in Almonte, Lenka owns and operates the Sunroom Studio, where she crafts stunning ceramic pieces that reflect her unique cultural background and artistic vision. As a dedicated member of the Almonte Potters Guild and serving on its Board of Directors, Lenka continues to contribute significantly to the local arts community. Her craftsmanship and creativity shine through in every piece she creates, making the Culture Connector award not only a symbol of recognition but also a work of art.

Let us extend our heartfelt congratulations to George. May his actions inspire us all to continue nurturing a spirit of unity and togetherness as we strive for a brighter future that values and cherishes the diversity that enriches us all.