

Speaker delivers powerful message at breakfast

By JOSEPH CHIN
Staff

There were more than yummy Eggs Benedict and buttery croissants to tuck into at this year's Cranberry Breakfast.

As if the savoury event, hosted annually by the Mississauga Arts Council, wasn't enough to give guests a great start to their day, there was also a side order of food for thought served up by Dan Blackburn.

A motivational speaker, youth mentor and athletic coach, the longtime Port Credit resident delivered a powerful message on how to live an inspiring and inspired life.

Blackburn began his talk by paying tribute to Nelson Mandela, who died yesterday and who, by happenstance, probably best exemplifies this year's Cranberry Breakfast theme of "Achieving the Greatness Within."

"He had unbreakable spirit and went through pain to teach us a valuable lesson," Blackburn told guests at the Living Arts Centre on Friday.

And it's by learning lessons — even through multiple setbacks and failures — that one can eventually arrive at what he calls Joy Island,

says Blackburn, who spoke from personal experience.

"As a young man, I felt virtually invincible when envisioning my success. I worked hard and focused intently on my dreams. As I grew older and ventured into the real world, I began to lose my drive and allowed fear to stop me in my tracks.

"I hit rock bottom: I was jobless, living in a room I rented from a friend with no savings or business experience ... struggling in my personal relationships and finding no support from my family, and too afraid to ask anyone for help."

It was at that point, back in 1994, that Blackburn realized hard work wasn't enough — he needed a plan.

"The realization transformed me from a dreamer into a doer and was the genesis for what would eventually become my life mantra: Dream. Plan. Execute."

Over the past 16 years, through these "pillars of greatness," he has trained thousands of athletes including NHLers like P.K. Subban of the Montreal Canadiens and last year's winner of the James Norris Memorial Trophy for top defenseman; David Bolland of the Toronto Maple Leafs, who won two Stanley Cups

with the Chicago Blackhawks; Tyler Seguin of the Dallas Stars; and Jeff Skinner of the Carolina Hurricanes, who recently scored his first NHL hat-trick.

Blackburn first came across Skinner as a 12-year-old. Even though he was small, the player always insisted that he was going to make it to the NHL, Blackburn recalled.

The lesson? Whatever you do, do it with passion — and don't allow other people to sit in judgment.

"When you're on Joy Island, it doesn't matter what others think," Blackburn said.

Even though he's now a successful, much sought-after motivational speaker, Blackburn notes he still gets the jitters when it's time to get up on stage. However, the important thing, he says, is to take advantage of that fear by following his Dream. Plan. Execute. motto.

"I'm here on this planet to deliver this message and I do it with every ounce of energy and fibre that I have ... and I feel great doing it," he said.

The event began with jazzy Christmas carols played by pianist Victor Cheng. There were also raffle draws and a discussion following Blackburn's presentation.



Linda Thomas, executive director of the Mississauga Arts Council, and motivational speaker and longtime Port Credit resident Dan Blackburn were at the 2013 Cranberry Breakfast hosted by MAC at the Living Arts Centre on Friday.
Staff photo by Fred Loek