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Export date: Sat Oct 31 13:33:55 2026 / +0000 GMT

UGOT Brunch Honours Occasional Teachers with awards on International Women?s Day

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LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

The Upper Grand Occasional Teachers' (UGOT) Local marked International Women's Day on Saturday, March 7, with a community brunch recognizing the vital but often unseen contributions of occasional teachers.

Held from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Trattoria Semplice in Orangeville, the event brought together educators, union leaders, community partners and local officials under the theme ?Together We Rise.' Food prepared by the staff at Trattoria Semplice was served for brunch, complete with dessert.

Four occasional teachers who identify as women or non-binary were selected by their colleagues for exemplifying leadership, advocacy, creativity and service in Upper Grand schools.

The program opened with MC Nitya Patel inviting attendees to reflect on International Women's Day as both a celebration of women's achievements and a reminder that equity is ongoing work.

?International Women's Day is celebrated around the world as a call to recognize the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women, and also as a reminder that equity is ongoing work,? she said. ?Today we gather not only to reflect on progress, but to celebrate the women in this room, the educators, leaders, artists and community builders whose daily work shapes futures.?

UGOT President Nkese Charles-Campbell described the brunch as more than a social gathering, calling it a statement that visibility, community and partnership matter in public education. She reminded attendees of the important role occasional teachers serve.

?Occasional teachers step into classrooms with little notice, adapt with skill and compassion, and hold space for students with a professionalism that deserves to be celebrated,? she said. ?This morning, we have the privilege of recognizing three occasional teachers whose dedication often unfolds quietly, but never without impact.?

Three occasional teachers were formally recognized from the stage.

Simrin Chahal of Centennial Hylands Elementary School in Shelburne was honoured as a School Community Champion for her ability to build strong relationships, support colleagues and boost morale through thoughtful initiatives.

Giasmine Samaniego of Glenbrook Elementary School in Shelburne received the Heart of Education Award for creating inclusive, joyful learning spaces and offering consistent, individualized support to students.

Mulmur resident Jessie Steinberg, founder of LEAP Adventures, received the Guiding Light Leadership Award for leadership that extends beyond the classroom through programs such as drumming workshops that build confidence, voice and community.

In alignment with this year's International Women's Day theme, ?Give to Gain,? proceeds beyond event costs will support three women-led or women-serving organizations in Dufferin County: Family Transition Place, The Shoebox Project ? Help Secure Her Tomorrow Campaign, and Streams Community Hub.

Campbell said that this event was a reaffirmation of the power of mutual support and what is possible with compassion, understanding and advocacy.

?This event reflects our belief that when we take care of our teachers, our teachers can take care of our students, and when we invest in women, our entire community rises.?

For UGOT, its partners, and guests, the brunch signalled an ongoing commitment to make the work of occasional teachers visible, to invest in women and non-binary leaders, and to ensure that, in the spirit of ?Together We Rise,? the gains made in classrooms ripple outward through the entire community.