

Community Living hosts 9th Annual Mayors Luncheon

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by Fred Groves

Leadership is an attitude you develop.

That was the message Robert Pio Hajjar brought to this year's Community Living-Essex County's Mayor's Luncheon.

With his contagious energy and overwhelming personality, Pio Hajjar revved up the crowd by having them standup and dance at the St. Mary's Parish Hall in Maidstone.

"Each of you is a leader and each of you are important to your community," said the 36-year-old who was born with Down syndrome.

Pio Hajjar is an international speaker who is a high school graduate, an eight-year volunteer with the Children's Aid Society, and among his other accomplishments, is the holder of the Special Olympics record in 25m freestyle.

“I always wanted to be a leader. Never let someone tell you that you can’t do something,” he said.

He has also won many awards including the inaugural United Nations designated ‘World Down Syndrome Day’ Award and the Canadian Down Syndrome Society Self-Advocate of the Year. Pio Hajjar is the founder of his own non-profit organization.

“My parents said I was a gift from God and that they would never give me away. I don’t mess with the man upstairs,” he said.

The 9th Annual Mayors’ Luncheon had well over 100 people in attendance.

Founded in 1961, Community Living-Essex County hosts the event to network and to let community and business leaders know how important their support is to the community.

“We appreciate what you do all year long to help so many meet their potential,” said Lakeshore Mayor Tom Bain.

Community Living is in the process of becoming accredited and hope to have more information on that at their June 17 Annual General Meeting. One of the projects in the works is having guest speakers who have intellectual disabilities go out and bring their messages to the community.

After previewing a new program called ‘Keep Calm and be Excellent’, Pio Hajjar said that people with disabilities are just like everyone else.

“My heart is big and I have enough love for all of you. I don’t judge people and I stand up for my friends.”

Besides the upcoming AGM, Community-Living will be hosting their annual fundraising golf tournament on July 16.