

Showing up: How Rafael helps make Huron a better place

Rafael is on the hunt. The sun is beating down on the Goderich beach on a July afternoon and Rafael is scanning debris washed ashore. Among the sticks and dried weeds are plastic bottles, latex gloves and candy bar wrappers. He pulls each item of garbage out and drops it in a plastic bag.

"Anything that can harm animals or pollute the water, I do not hesitate to pick it up and put it in the garbage," the 36-year-old says.

Since he moved to Goderich in 2024, Rafael has spent countless hours quietly picking up garbage on the beach. It's just one of the ways he's got involved in the community.

"The first time I got involved was after I saw a sign at the Legion, they were organizing a Santa Claus dinner. They needed help to wrap up some gifts for Christmas, and I joined the people that were assisting that day and then helped serve a Christmas dinner," he says.

Since then, Rafael has also assisted the team from No Hate in Huron in organizing events. He's sewed outfits for drag performances, decorated at the organization's anniversary party, served refreshments, led the organization's Peace March in Goderich.

He's also supported the Canadian Mental Health Association of Huron Perth by getting involved in an overdose awareness march and helped the United Way Perth Huron fundraise by taking part in Coldest Night of the Year and walking with the organization in the Goderich Santa Clause parade.

Sometimes, if he spots an area of the community that needs to be tidied, he steps into action.

"The entrance of the library needed a little cleanup. So I woke up on Sunday, and then I didn't think twice. Nobody asked me, I just went myself and took off the spider webs at the entrance and cleaned up the dead leaves. It makes it nicer for everyone," Rafael says.

For his selfless efforts to improve the community, Rafael was nominated for an I Am Huron award.

"In the time Rafael has spent in Goderich, his impact on this community has been remarkable, and almost entirely behind the scenes," wrote Patrick Corvyn, who nominated him for the I Am Huron award. "Rafael does not seek recognition. He does not ask to be celebrated. He simply shows up, again and again, for the people of Huron County who need someone to show up for them."

Rafael moved to Canada from Mexico in 2009 and lived in Toronto and Niagara Falls before moving to Goderich.

The I Am Huron awards are a Huron County-wide initiative to showcase the diverse contributions that immigrants and newcomers to Canada make in our communities. The campaign aims to celebrate immigrants and highlight the positive impact they make in many different areas.

"Rafael represents the very best of what immigration brings to Huron County. He spends his time giving this area care," Corvyn stated.

Back on the beach, Rafael smiles as his cleanup continues. One piece of trash at a time, the bag begins to fill. In a small way, it's emblematic of the broader way Rafael quietly makes the community better; piece by piece, one small act at a time, actions that add up to an overflowing amount of quiet kindness.

The I Am Huron awards celebrate the contributions immigrants and newcomers to Canada make in Huron County's communities. Nominations are received from the community, reviewed by a committee with lived experience of immigration, and awarded at a ceremony.

The project is funded with support from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

For more about this campaign, visit: <https://www.huroncounty.ca/i-am-huron/>