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TORONTO STAR

STAR COLUMNISTS OPINION

Top 10 winners and losers of 2020

This year has been one of the most tumultuous in most people's memory. But despite the hardships, or perhaps because of it, the human spirit has prevailed in many instances, as attested by Bob Hepurn's list Top 10 winners. Another 10 were not so fortunate.

By Bob Hepburn Star Columnist
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As this year of COVID-19 draws mercifully to a close, it's time to reflect on the people and events that topped the news in 2020.

And thus, here are my 13th annual picks for the year's best and worst from across Canada. As in past years, tough choices had to be made, especially among the large field of losers, which is why some big names didn't make the final cut.

First, the winners, in no particular order:

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1. Health-care workers: Nurses, personal support workers, orderlies, doctors and others from Newfoundland to the Yukon are modern-day heroes for their front-line work in dealing with COVID-19.

2. Laurent Duvernay-Tardif and Alfonso Davies: This pair shared the 2020 Lou Marsh Award as Canada's top athlete. Duvernay-Tardif, who has a medical degree, opted out of playing in the NFL this season to work on COVID-19 medical front-lines in Quebec. His salary would have been $2.7 million (U.S.). Davies, 20, who plays for soccer power Bayern Munich, is one of the world's top young players. Born in a refugee camp in Ghana, he's a huge supporter of the UN High Commission for Refugees.

3. The Weeknd: This famous Scarborough-bred musician donated $500,000 to hospitals battling COVID-19 in the Toronto area where he grew up. The money comes from sales of his COVID face masks.

4. Teara Fraser: This founder of the first female-run Indigenous airline, Iskwew Air based in Vancouver, is one of 18 women from around the world to be featured in a graphic novel anthology by DC Comics called Wonderful Women of History. Among the other "real-world heroes" is the late U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

5. David Ayres: This part-time Zamboni driver was called in as an emergency backup goalie for the Carolina Hurricanes and went on to beat the Toronto Maple Leafs. He's the first emergency goaltender to record a win in NHL history.

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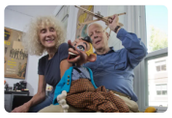

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6. Chrystia Freeland: This federal cabinet minister was such a hit in co-ordinating federal-provincial COVID-19 responses that Ontario Premier Doug Ford, no fan of the federal Liberals, said when she was named as finance minister, "I absolutely love Chrystia Freeland. She's amazing."

7. Roberta Battaglia: This singer from Vaughan, Ont., with a powerful voice beyond her

years made it to the final five of the hit show, “America’s Got Talent.” She was only 10 years old at the time.

8. Schitt’s Creek: This Canadian comedy show made TV history by sweeping all seven comedy categories at the Emmy Awards, including all four major acting categories. It won a total of nine awards.

9. Dancing with Parkinson’s and all charities like it: This Toronto-based group is a prime example of charities that were forced by COVID-19 to pivot and have done so successfully. DWP had held in-person dance classes for seniors with the disease, but quickly switched to free daily online classes. Today, over 700 seniors from across Canada are registered for the classes.

10. Hamster girl: Victoria Raechel, 21, has turned her passion for hamsters into a profitable YouTube career, with more than 400,000 subscribers and some 60 million views. She began her hamster-care tutorials when she was 12. She’s so secretive and won’t reveal her last name (Raechel is her middle name) or where she lives.

And now the losers:

1. WE Charity: This Toronto-based organization faced financial ruin, forcing it to close its Canadian operations after the controversy of the Trudeau government’s now-canceled plan to have it operate a $500-million student-volunteer program.

2. Bill Morneau: This federal finance minister resigned in the wake of the WE Charity mess. He failed to disclose that a daughter worked at WE on a one-year contract and that he hadn’t repayed $41,000 in travel costs to WE for trip his family took in 2017.

3. All holidays: From Easter to Canada Day, Thanksgiving, Halloween and all other major holidays, COVID-19 restrictions put an end (at least for this year) to large family celebrations.

4. Double-blue license plates: This new Ontario license plates hailed by Premier Doug Ford turned out to be illegible at night. Ford eventually cancelled the plates, saying the move "breaks my heart."

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5. Blue Mountain: When this Ontario resort near Collingwood reopened after a COVID-19 closure, it started charging $59 for adults to hike on its forest trails. Children age four and under were charged *only* $19. Even nature isn't free, eh?

6. Doug Ford: The Ontario premier has watched the high ratings he enjoyed in the early COVID stages fall sharply over his recent handling of pandemic lockdowns, easing of environmental controls and push to grant university status to a private evangelical college.

7. Bad moose: Officials in Jasper National Park have had to erect signs warning drivers that moose love to lick salt off the sides of idling vehicles, which could damage cars — as well as the naughty moose.

8. Wexit Canada Party: The federal party created to champion western separation hated its name so much that it changed it to the Maverick Party. A makeover isn't likely to help its raison d'être, though, with most westerners believing separation is a bad idea.

9. Milne ice shelf: The last known intact ice shelf in the Arctic, the massive 4,000-year-old shelf located in an area on Ellesmere Island known as "the place where the ice never melts," broke apart, another victim of global warming.

10. Tracey Wilson: This strident pro-gun lobbyist calls families who have experienced gun violence and are urging stricter firearms controls "buffoons," "ghouls" and "sick." Such nasty talk may thrill her gun-lobby friends, but it sickens most others.

Bob Hepburn *is a Star politics columnist and based in Toronto. Follow him on Twitter: @BobHepburn*

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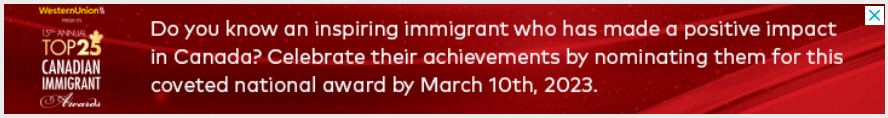

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