Aurora student encouraged to ?spread optimism? in royal encounter



By Brock Weir

From spearheading initiatives weaving bed mats for the developing world or helping to build the foundations of a school in Ecuador, Julia Garbe dedicated her high school career to lending a hand.

But, now in university, the Aurora student is being urged to kick things up a notch ? and, when the urging comes from a member of the Royal Family, it just might be a command performance.

Garbe has seen the world and discovered herself participating in the Duke of Edinburgh's Awards program. Having first achieved her Bronze award as a student at King's Country Day School, she was presented with the Gold award last month by none other than Prince Harry, grandson of the 96-year-old Duke.

There was excitement in the air as she joined 149 other Gold Award winners for a reception at Toronto's Royal York Hotel, which was Prince Harry's base while in town for the Invictus Games, but it wasn't quite what she was expecting.

?I was notified by email that the Gold Award was going to be presented from Prince Harry and I immediately forwarded it to my mom because I knew she would freak out,? says Julia with a laugh. ?It was funny to tell my friends [at Waterloo] that I was going to be receiving an award from Prince Harry. It was interesting to meet him because he is such a casual person, which you generally wouldn't expect from royalty and it was nice to meet everyone who had also gone through the awards system. When you see how involved everyone is, it makes you feel really optimistic for the future.?

This was an optimism apparently shared by Prince Harry as well, who spoke to each of the recipients individually.

?He asked us how long it took to get the award, how involved we were and how proud of us he was,? says Ms. Garbe. ?He also said it was important to ?share the love with everyone you meet' and just continue to spread your optimism with the world.?

Spreading that optimism has been a cornerstone of Julia's journey through the wards program.

When she first heard about it, she says she was ?fascinated? by the challenge because it is the only program she had heard of where your main competitor is simply yourself.

?You set goals for yourself and the entire time you're trying to beat out your past self and make yourself better through all sorts of exciting activities,? she says.?

The awards program is broken up into four main categories, each with their own standards on how they can be met.

The first component is ?Service to the Community,? criteria which Ms. Garbe fulfilled through many avenues, including serving as Student Council President and spearheading an ongoing initiative at CDS collecting milk bags which are collected, woven, and ?up-cycled? into mattresses for undersupplied hospitals in the developing world.

She fulfilled the second component, ?Physical Fitness?, through her ongoing commitment to swimming and softball, while the ?Skill Development? criterion saw her focus on her clarinet.

The fourth component, ?Adventurous Journey? took her on exciting canoe trips throughout Ontario where she learned how to navigate by compass and topographical maps, coming home armed with wood-chopping skills picked up along the way.

A fifth component comes into play once participants are in the Gold stretch; the Residential component encourages individuals to

get out of their comfort zone to immerse themselves in a different environment. This took Julia to Ecuador where she and her fellow students, through the Me to We program, helped build a
village school.

?The Duke of Edinburgh sets that foundation habit of becoming involved and you can continue it on your own later,? she says, noting the Skills Development component led her to the school robotics team which encouraged her to pursue engineering at the post-secondary level. ?Going through the Bronze and Silver set the fundamental habit of volunteering. Now, I wouldn't pass by an opportunity without jumping at it anymore.?

This is something that is standing her in good stead at Waterloo. The lessons learned through the Duke of Edinburgh program have helped her build her leadership skills and her confidence.

?It can be on as small a scale as talking to the person next to you, joining an Ultimate Frisbee team, even if you don't know how to play, or even walking back to residence from a lecture, passing a marching band and ask, ?Hey, would you mind if I join?' I have been really able to develop my character and learn so much about myself.

?Not only have I learned about myself, I have also been able to create myself, I think. I guess you could say inside me there was a desire to be involved, a desire to learn and a desire to create, but more than learning about myself I have created myself and built on all of these desires. Through life you are continually developing yourself and the process of developing my character is what I learned the most through the Duke of Edinburgh. The world would be an amazing place if everyone went for their Duke of Edinburgh award.?