

Aurora business student to shadow Pan Am Games CEO



By Brock Weir

As a student at Cardinal Carter Catholic High School, Michael Delplavignano knew he had a head for business, but he didn't know where to turn.

A brochure from a guidance counsellor introduced him to the Ivey School of Business, sending the Grade 11 student on a path on which he never looked back. Just weeks away from graduating from Ivey, this future business leader recently scored a place in a once in a lifetime opportunity to put him on the forefront of an event which will have a significant impact on Ontario.

Delplavignano is one of seven finalists rising to the top in Odgers Berndtson's CEOx1 Day program, which matches Canada's top university students with Canada's top CEOs.

Through the program, finalists will have a chance to spend a day shadowing some of Canada's top movers and shakers, senior executives with a significant influence on their fields.

"Our CEOx1 Day program is designed to uncover Canada's most promising future talent and we've selected seven exceptional students from a field of high-quality applicants across Ontario," said Robert Quinn of Odgers Berndtson. "These individuals demonstrated their outstanding academic and social leadership. The advantage of this program for the finalist, as well as everyone who went through the qualification rounds is they will have garnered a much deeper understanding of their leadership credentials, which will be valuable in their future careers. This is truly the next generation of top talent in Canada."

Delplavignano made it through a lengthy selection process, which included not only marks from their respective universities, but essays and interviews with the firm's partners before moving onto the final round. He joins students from as far away as China to as close as Toronto in getting one-on-one mentorships from Canada's CEOs.

Michael is paired with Saad Rafi, CEO of the Toronto 2015 Pan Am/Parapan Am Games Organizing Committee. For an Aurora native with an extensive background in Aurora Minor Hockey as well as the Aurora Jays Baseball Club, pairing up with the driving force behind one of the largest sporting events in Canada's history is a fitting, if daunting, prospect.

"This is a great opportunity to see somebody who has been given so much responsibility, where they have to balance planning ahead and doing what is best for the city and all the arrangements that go into it," Delplavignano tells The Auroran. "There is an immense amount of planning that goes into it and it will [be] interesting [to shadow] someone with so much on their shoulders."

"In doing our school cases, we often take on the role of a CEO and think about what we would do to solve a given problem. On a daily basis, you are not facing strategic problems that are going to drive the whole business, but they still have that responsibility. Getting to spend a day with them and understanding what they do on a day-to-day basis is just a great opportunity."

With 10,000 athletes coming to Toronto, Delplavignano sees this as an opportunity the entire GTA can get behind. The impact, he said, is going to be huge and that is something which has always interested him. Details are still a bit murky right now on just what he will be doing shadowing Mr. Rafi over the course of the day, but he says he is most looking forward to getting to know Rafi himself and "getting his mentality" on how they do things and how he has gotten to where he is.

"Becoming a CEO is a product of opportunity and really hard work, and understanding how he was able to leverage that today would be great," he said. "I would also like to know what a CEO does on a day to day basis. I understand they are the vision for an organization and they drive towards their goals and objectives, but operationally I don't really know what that means on a day to day basis."

Being on a board, however, will not be a foreign concept to him. As a student at the University of Western Ontario, and an active volunteer with the United Way, he is on the Board of Directors of Child Reach, a non-profit in London, Ontario, and an off-shoot of the United Way.

After graduating from school this spring, he has lined up a position at Accenture Canada for the fall.

"There are a lot of things you just can't learn in the classroom in terms of dealing with people, developing leadership and things like that are ultimately real important skills in the real world," he says. "If you take advantage of the opportunities that are available, you will really be that much further ahead."