

St. Jerome students' innovative ideas garner awards recognition



By Brock Weir

The Rubik's Cube has confounded many of us since it first hit the market over 40 years ago.

They have been tackled with gusto, thrown across the room in frustration, and occasionally solved ? but students at Aurora's St. Jerome Catholic School put 40 years of innovation into action, their target being solving the Rubik's Cube once and for all.

A LEGO robot, equipped with a colour sensor, is just one of the student innovations that caught the eye of the EdCan Network. The EdCan Network, a resource promoting innovative teaching, is set to visit the east Aurora school on Wednesday to present students with the Ken Spencer Award for Innovation in Teaching and Learning.

The award will be presented to the school for their SPLICE projects, an initiative that brings together students' building, construction, coding, engineering, digital arts, culinary arts, filmmaking performance and arts skills and has the kids focus on their interest for one specific project that ?allows students the opportunity to push their imagination and take risks without fear of failure.?

In the process, teachers mentor students working on their projects instead of instructing them, ?allowing students the opportunity to push their imaginations without fear of failure.?

The Rubik's Cube-solving robot is the brainchild of Grade 8 students Christian Roldan and Juliano Grossi, who say they were challenged to go the distance.

?A bunch of people

said it was impossible, that we couldn't do it, that it was really going to be challenging and that drove us really far," says Juliano. "They said it was impossible, but we wanted to prove them wrong."

Through some trial and error, and some technical challenges when it came to the on-board infrared colour sensor, that's exactly what they did, and now their robot can solve that maddening novelty toy in just over a minute.

On the artistic side of things, fellow Grade 8 students Ruby Brown, Estelle Kim and Paola Tenaglia put their filmmaking skills into action on a special graduation video that captures their graduating class's school year in a neat, emotionally-charged package.

The full video will be unveiled next month near the end of the school year, but the trio have shared a teaser trailer with the school community that already has their peers buzzing.

"We wanted to do something a little bit out of our comfort zones but still interesting to us," explains Ruby.

Adds Estelle: "Last year, I was introduced to video-making [through] a school project where we had to make a video-oriented PSA and I really, really enjoyed editing and taking video."

"The three of us have been really interested in all parts of [filmmaking] and we felt the grad video would also have the emotional factor to it, and that's what drove us even further."

All this is music to the ears of Principal Siobhan Wright.

When Juliano joked that he wanted to do SPLICE because he wouldn't have to do an end-of-year speech, Ms. Wright is quick on the button.

"Speeches are very traditional and our junior and intermediates have an opportunity to do them, but they don't recognize that when you're up there [presenting the SPLICE projects], guess what you're doing?" she says. "That's what makes this so successful. It is something we want to see going forward because it is not the typical oral communication; students actually get to go up there, speak about what they are passionate about, and basically what they are going to be doing later on in their lifetimes: speaking at their job opportunities that we don't even know exist yet! The oral communication piece and presenting is all going

to be a part of that ? and you didn't even know you did it!?

The Ken Spencer Awards for Innovation in
Teaching and Learning recognize innovative work taking place in classrooms
across Canada.