

Adventurous twosome awarded Duke of Edinburgh awards by L-G



Aurora's Justin Ford (Above) and Kyle Barber (Bottom) were awarded their silver Duke of Edinburgh's Awards by Lieutenant-Governor David Onley at Queen's Park on Saturday. Photos by Grant Martin Photography.

By Brock Weir

One snowshoed through the Ontario wilderness, walked for Heart, and developed quite a beat on the drums.

The other taught others to streak down the ski slopes, and then went rustic on a nine-day canoeing and portaging trek, all the while kicking butt in black belt.

Both received special Silver Awards from Lieutenant-Governor David Onley on Saturday as part of the Duke of Edinburgh's Awards.

Kyle Barber and Justin Ford, both graduates of St. Andrew's College (Ford as recently as Friday) received the penultimate awards in the youth program founded by Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, in the early 1950s, and established in Canada 50 years ago this year, at an impressive ceremony at Queen's Park.

Barber was singled out for his community service, participating in Walk for Heart and volunteering at the York Region branch of the OSPCA. For the "adventurous" part of his program, he completed a four-day snowshoeing trek through the Haliburton Highlands while focusing on tennis, basketball, and squash in his spare time.

Ford took a different track; taking on the role as a volunteer ski teacher as part of his community service program, he journeyed into the wild for a nine-day trip of canoeing, portaging, and living off the land "perhaps being extra cautious with his body as he was also working (successfully) towards achieving his black belt in Karate.

While preparing to receive his award in Toronto, Mr. Barber told The Auran that he was introduced to the program by one teacher at SAC who was a particular advocate for it.

"Snowshoeing came together with one person who was organizing the trip as a qualifier for his gold and we all came together for it," he said. "We were in a cabin for four days during the winter in Haliburton and then we spent a large chunk of one day making something similar to igloos and slept in those for one of the nights. Then a lot of the time was just dedicated to making food and keeping everything in order, and trying to keep the cabin warm while we were in there.

The main lesson we learned was everyone needs to help out and lend a hand to keep everything running properly. When we got

there, it was kind of a mess until people started taking charge in different areas. [The program] gets you to try out a lot of new things and helps you get out of your comfort zone.?

Ford started the Duke of Edinburgh Award with the gold firmly in his sights and is now just 10 community service hours away from his personal golden finish line. Over the time it has taken him to get this far, he has not only helped teach countless youngsters how to hit the slopes, learned how to play the guitar, but also paddled over 100 km and undertaken over 30 portages during his nine day canoe trek.

?The program taught me how much I can accomplish,? said Mr. Ford. ?It was probably the first real challenge I have had in my life. I was carrying these heavy boxes around my neck while portaging a kilometre and a kilometre and a half. It was pretty tough. There were times where I felt pretty exhausted and ready to call it quits, but when I came back from it I felt I could really achieve most things I set my mind to and I have gone on to try some very challenging things. I know through my experience with the Duke of Ed really helped me pull through them.

?I have gotten new passions and new experiences that I definitely would not have gotten without it. I have a new love of canoeing, I learned how to play the guitar, I took leadership credits and it was amazing experience.?

76 recipients in all from across Ontario received their Silver awards from the Lieutenant-Governor. The program is open to youth ages 14 to 25 and focuses on challenging youth in community service, skill development, physical fitness and adventurous journey.

Since Prince Philip established the Canadian offshoot of the program in 1963, over half a million young Canadians have taken up the challenge, earning their bronze, silver, and gold awards.

