

Alexander's legacy tempers tears at ESC Renaissance



By Brock Weir and Bethann Merkle



Students celebrate their win while hoisting a photo in honour of Alexander. Grade 12 students at Aurora's Ecole Secondaire Catholique de Renaissance had 10,000 reasons to smile last week after plans for their prom got a \$10,000 boost from Laurentian University.

Officials from the university joined the future ESC Renaissance Grads in a special cheque presentation at the school Friday afternoon. The students won the grant from the university in a special video contest proving that their video was 'awesome.' These smiles, however, were a welcome relief from the tears in the school community as one of the students instrumental in making the video was not there to share the glory.

While students gratefully accepted the cheque from Patrick Lafontaine, chief liaison from the university, Friday's event also served as a memorial to Alexander Roy-Lachapelle.

The Grade 12 student lost his long-time battle with depression on the GO Tracks last Tuesday morning, just north of St. John's Sideroad. As sad as Alexander's death was for the ESC Renaissance community, it mobilized them to get out the vote and make the objective of their collective video a reality for their Grade 12 class.

'The students and the whole community have rallied together to pay homage to Alexander,' said ESC Renaissance principal Martyne Laurin. 'They have talked, they have sent emails [saying], 'You have to do this in honour of Alexander. Vote! Vote! We really want you to vote in honour of Alexander, for this video is his honour. We have to win this prize in his honour.'

'The energy was tangible at every level - the personnel, students, the parents, and the community - everyone got together and put their energy into his honour. The video did win the competition and this is such wonderful news for us.'

Earlier in the week, some students - both current and former - expressed some criticism, however, in how the situation was handled. Some thought it was inappropriate that the tragedy was used to get out the vote, coupled with the prize money being used for the

prom rather than a donation to the Canadian Mental Health Association, as Alexander's parents had requested in their son's obituary.

These concerns evaporated, however, when his parents bravely and unexpectedly joined students at Friday's ceremony to help them accept the cheque.

"Most of you did not know Alexander," said his father, Richard Lachapelle, visibly overcome with emotion. "He left us a bit too soon, but I wish you would do me a great honour for Alexander: Study very hard and persevere because you have your lives in front of you and your future belongs to you."

Ms. Laurin added that students planning the prom have not yet determined how the funds will be used, but Mr. Lafontaine confirmed now that the money is in the hands of students, it is up to them how the money will be used.

"We challenged Ontario schools to tell us why their school was awesome, and they were challenged to produce a short video, upload it and try to foster some votes from their communities and schools," he said. "We're proud of what we do and who we are [these competitions] help us spread the word about who we are and creates a lot of fun."

Later, Alexander's parents encouraged people to not remember him for his illness, but be grateful for his life and the smart, caring, and fun person that he was.

"He was an amazing young man," said his mother, Marsha Roy. "He was so, so smart."

She recalled the fun they used to have playing games in the car, as well as his love for movies, a love for which they were not always eye to eye. One movie they did agree on was "Lincoln" as Alexander started to become more interested in the world around him.

"[Lincoln] was a man who fought for equal rights for all and Alex believed in equal rights for all," she said. "He had recently started to read his father's Economist because he was just so interested in world affairs and politics. We probably made him a little too liberal, but we like that!"

"Please remember Alex with all kinds of good things and smile when you think of him. He had an amazing sense of humour. He was smart and he was caring. We only had him for 17-and-a-half years, but they were the best 17-and-a-half years of my life. He will always be forever loved and in our hearts always."

Richard recalled his trips into the great outdoors with her son, including following routes on Canada's rivers, following in the paddle strokes of one of their ancestors who served as a *coureur des bois*, a journey which thrilled them both.

"It is sad that Alex is no longer with us, but we have to always remember the good times," he said. "Let's focus on the positive. It is useless to dwell on the negative because that only creates bad feelings and that doesn't solve anything. Besides, that is not going to bring him back. Let's just remember the positives and please, parents, hug your children tonight."

Following the school's ceremony, Rejean Sirois, Director of Education for Conseil scolaire de district catholique Centre-Sud, told The Auroran the school board is looking into additional support within schools to combat bullying, but declined to comment further out of respect for the family.