

Aurora student lands \$60,000 scholarship for young leaders



(Lukas Weese, centre, with members of his Country Day School debate team. Submitted photo)

By Brock Weir

Lukas Weese is a realist at heart.

As he prepared to take his final exams this spring at Country Day School, the Aurora student knew his name had been put forward by the school for a pretty significant scholarship for when he heads to the University of Toronto this fall to study math and science. But, if you think the question of "What if?" might have nagged at the back of Mr. Weese's mind as he studied, you don't know Lukas Weese.

"I knew going in I was just one student out of many applicants for the University of Toronto, so to get it was just so surprising," he says. "The chances of getting this were very low, it doesn't come to people every day, so it was truly remarkable to say the least."

Weese and his family found the fateful letter in the mail just before he began sitting the first of his final exams. He had talked to his parents about the potential scholarship before the application, but there seemed to be a sense of disbelief after the letter actually arrived, informing them that he had indeed secured the scholarship for a whopping \$60,000.

"It was very moving and surprising for sure," he tells The Auroran. "I am so honoured and happy to be representing a great group of Schulich leaders. I think it is great for first year students coming into university."

The Schulich Leadership Scholarships were established in 2001 by philanthropist Seymour Schulich. 75 students receive the award each year to put towards their undergraduate degrees in science, technology, engineering and math. According to the Leaders program, a \$100 million endowment fund has been established to "create the next generation of technology innovators" in both Canada and Israel.

But a potential student has to display more than academic prowess in those very specific fields; nominees "and there were 1,147 this year" also have to demonstrate at least one other attribute, whether it is outstanding community, business, or entrepreneurial leadership, or financial need.

Weese's outstanding contributions not only to the Country Day School community, but also to Aurora, helped seal the deal.

“Mr. Weese's philanthropic leadership and pursuit of excellence stood out to the selection committee, said Seymour Schulich in a statement. “We congratulate Mr. Weese for being among the recipients and look forward to his future achievements.”

Having taken home many awards for his debating skills over the years, away from the podium Weese has been very active in raising both money and awareness for the Aurora-based Safehaven, which provides and assists in care for severely disabled children. First introduced to Safehaven through a school program, he and fellow students secured the organization a \$5,000 grant, but they continued their work with Safehaven, with Weese eventually becoming their ambassador within the community.

“Giving back clicked for me when I was in Grade 5,” Weese explains. “I was very sick in hospital for three weeks and missed a large portion of my Grade 5 year. When I was in the hospital, I realised that there were kids around me who were a lot sicker than I was and I realised we need to help those people who are in need.”

His efforts started “small,” he said, with hospital fundraisers and participating in Me to We through Free the Children, but things really came to a head with Safehaven. He was instrumental in the charity's fundraising efforts through Magna's Wild Wild West Hoedown and, after meeting with Mayor Geoffrey Dawe, secured them a place as a benefiting organization in the annual Mayor's Charity Golf Tournament.

“It is just helping those people in need because the more you give back, the more you are going to get back with larger returns,” says Weese. “I have always believed that and I believe that helping others is important, and we have to do our role in the community to achieve that.”

With a \$60,000 Leader Scholarship under his belt when he goes off to U of T this fall, Weese says he feels a certain extra kind of responsibility when he walks through those doors. He says he wants to live up to the criteria which secured him the scholarship and get involved outside the classroom in a number of different areas.

“I think there is a responsibility, but I am happy to pursue that,” he says. “I am honoured because not a lot of people have this opportunity and I am very fortunate to be in a position going forward to pursue what I love and have this always with me and connect with current and former Schulich leaders who have a lot to bring to the table. It's a great responsibility, but I am privileged for sure.”