

Country Day School student awarded largest Canadian STEM scholarship



Marianna Speranza received the exciting news while driving home from rep volleyball practice with her parents last month.

She had won a coveted \$80,000 Schulich Leader Scholarship to attend Western University where she will be studying Computer Science and Business Administration at the Ivy Business School.

Nominated for her outstanding academics and entrepreneurial spirit, Marianna is only the second Country Day School student to receive this award.

She remembers her awareness and interest in STEM starting in Grade 7 when CDS's Computer Science teacher, Mr. Moorlag, hosted a Hackergal Hackathon where Middle School girls took part in a six-hour coding marathon working in teams of three to create a video game.

?I was already into video games and have always been good at math. I already liked computers and playing computer games, and Mr. Moorlag just brought the subject to life for me. His passion helped ignite mine.?

Since then, Marianna has excelled in her Computer Science and Math courses, as well as Drama and English. Her business acumen led her to become involved in DECA, an international student program that prepares emerging leaders and entrepreneurs in marketing, finance, hospitality and management in high schools and colleges around the globe, and in Grade 10 she was appointed Executive Provincial Officer for DECA Ontario.

The following year she became Senior Workshop Coordinator for HOSA Canada, a student club that enables secondary and post-secondary students to become leaders in the healthcare industry by enabling them to acquire knowledge, skills training and leadership development through competition.

Harnessing her entrepreneurial spirit, Marianna and her sister Stacey ?19, a third-year student at U of T's Rotman School of

Business, launched their own interview-based podcast while quarantining at home during the early months of COVID.

The Business Casual is geared toward helping females grow professionally and personally.

As the show's producer, Marianna edits each show and creates the graphics for their Instagram and LinkedIn pages. Now almost into their third year, the sisters launch two podcasts a month interviewing female industry leaders and young professionals, and recently signed with Business Audio Network by Amplified Audio in the United States.

?The Schulich Leaders Award is designed to recognize that unique individual with a STEM mind and an entrepreneurial heart, and that is Marianna,? says David Huckvale, Director of Post-Secondary Counselling at CDS. ?She has created, founded and led at CDS and beyond. We can't wait to see what comes next.?

It was Mr. Huckvale who first encouraged Marianna to apply for the Schulich Award. Marianna had been exploring other awards, including the Loran, but felt that the Schulich embodied what she was good at (STEM) and was more ?true to who she is.?

Apart from the incredible financial benefit this scholarship will afford her, she is now part of an esteemed network of national STEM scholars at one of Canada's leading universities. ?The networking opportunities will be limitless,? Marianna explained.

?We will be assigned mentors from Google Canada and each month there will be networking sessions with Schulich Leader Scholarship alumni, and conferences each year with leaders in technology. Because I will be associated with this scholarship, I will want to be even more involved as a leader at Western. It adds a little more pressure on my end as I will want to live up to the name of a Schulich leader.?

According to program founder Seymour Schulich, ?This group of 100 outstanding students will represent the best and brightest Canada has to offer and will make great contributions to society, both on a national and global scale. With their university expenses covered, they can focus their time on their studies, research projects, extracurriculars, and entrepreneurial ventures. They are the next generation of entrepreneurial-minded, technology innovators.?

By Kim Sillcox