

Leaders of Tomorrow Scholar takes 'giving back' from community to the world



**By
Brock Weir**

As she approached the podium, Sally Falk felt like what she contributed to her community as a youth was meaningful and had an impact on her community.

Now, the first recipient of the John West Memorial Leaders of Tomorrow Scholarship is continuing her work on the world stage, imparting the meaning and lasting impact of the work of her forebears and other Canadian heroes to visitors from around the globe.

The Town of Aurora is now accepting applicants for the 2019 John West Memorial Scholarship, a bursary created from a bequest from the late Aurora mayor John West for local youth pursuing post-secondary education who have made a concerted effort to have a positive impact on the community around them.

'It was really nice to receive such an honour in my high school years as it felt like what I contributed to my community as a young person growing up in Aurora was meaningful and had some sort of impact on the residents of Aurora,' says Ms. Falk, who now works as a team lead for the guide program run out of the Vimy Ridge and Beaumont-Hamel National Historic Sites in northern France. 'I was really lucky to grow up in Aurora; it's a great Town with lots of great people in elementary school, in high school, meeting lots of great students who wanted to do meaningful work, really pushed me to do more.'

While she says it

might be a cliché, Ms. Falk counts her time on Student Council at Aurora High School as one of her most fulfilling achievements growing up. Eventually rising through the ranks to Student Council President in her final year of school, she says she enjoyed being a voice for students and helping to foster an environment where everyone felt welcome and free to become involved.

“The John West

Memorial Scholarship really helped me move forward with my studies,” she says. “I ended up going overseas to France for the first two years of my degree (in history from Sciences Po Paris near Reims), then I had a little bit more liberty in choosing what school I wanted to go to and pursue my higher education.”

Now focusing on her

degree in Canadian Studies at the University of British Columbia, Ms. Falk is back in France until August, leading the team of guides at those hallowed Canadian battlefields.

“I worked as a guide

last summer at Vimy and had the privilege to learn a bit more about Canada's role in the First World War and share my knowledge with the visitors who came to the site from all over the world,” she says. “I was then hired back in 2019 to work for eight more months within the guide program to help mentor the new guides coming in and work a little bit more in developing the program. We're fifteen Canadians living in northern France, being an ambassador to Canada and for Canada's role in the First World War for all visitors who come to the site.

“Being on site is

quite striking. It is one of the largest preserved battlefields in the Region from the First World War. There is an emotional piece to the site. A lot of people remember Vimy Ridge as a battle that was a victory for the Canadian Corps in the First World War [and] this is about remembering and commemorating those losses not just during the assault on Vimy Ridge, but over the entire four years of the war. I hope to impart that sense of remembrance not just to Canadians but to everyone coming to visit the site. It can be overwhelming.”

Ms. Falk has a vested

interest in the site. Her great-grandfather fought at Vimy and was one of the lucky ones to survive the battle. Now as a student of history, Sally hopes to focus even further on her family roots in grad school, with his life and experiences playing a key role in ideas she has for her history thesis.

“It is awesome for

every student at that age to realise what a privilege it is to live in such a wonderful town,” says Sally, encouraging all Grade 12 students to consider applying for the John West Memorial Scholarship. “All it takes for the sort of achievements in these awards is a step of kindness and to reach out to fellow students and the community you have outside of school and the classroom, see what you can do and how you can reach out. Take more simple steps to improve

the lives of people who live in Aurora or other people who live outside of Aurora for people who aren't necessarily as privileged as ourselves to grow up there.?

For more information on how to apply for the 2019 John West Memorial Leaders of Tomorrow Scholarship, visit aurora.ca/leadersoftomorrow. The deadline to apply is Wednesday, May 1.