

Local student brings home the gold with the Duke of Ed award



By Brock Weir

It wouldn't be an understatement to say last week was a very good week for local student Adam Starr.

First, he was named Pickering College's Rugby MVP.

A couple of days later, he was named his graduating class' valedictorian.

And, to cap it all off, he received word he had achieved Gold in the Duke of Edinburgh's Awards, an accomplishment seldom completed by high school students before the end of their last year of high school.

‘It was probably one of the hardest things I have ever done,’ says Adam, an active member of the Aurora Barbarians Rugby Team, who also participates in Aurora Jays Baseball as well the Aurora Master Ducks Swim Club. ‘It has never been [completed] at this school in high school and that was my goal. It was a crunch, but two weeks before graduation, I got it and it was just the best feeling. Getting it in general was quite difficult, but getting it before graduating was the best thing that could have happened.’

The Duke of Edinburgh Award was founded by Prince Philip in 1956 to help youth from around the Commonwealth find the best within themselves through community service, athletics and getting out into the world by performing ‘adventurous journeys.’

Adam's adventurous journeys ranged from exchange programs in Australia to dog sledding in northern Ontario.

‘One of the things I really hold close [to my heart] is dog sledding, which I did twice,’ he explains. ‘The first time was in Grade 11 and I wasn't good at it then, then this year I went again and had more of a leadership role as well. You're literally out there for four days and if it is cold, you're cold, and if it's warm, that is a luxury.’

To prepare for the dog sledding trek, he had to participate in a ‘pre-journey’ which prepares teens for the task ahead. While chopping wood preparing the cabins and forts for the campers to sleep in, he slipped, the axe went right into his hand, and he proudly sports the scar near his thumb as a ‘Duke of Ed’ badge of honour.

‘It was decent,’ he says with a laugh. ‘You have to make some sacrifices to get through. You've got to do it. With the Duke of Ed, it will teach you.’

It was never easy, he notes, and he came close to giving up halfway through this, his final year at Pickering College, but he kept his eyes firmly on the finish line.

In the community volunteerism component of the program, Adam focused on many different areas, not the least of which was the area of food and food security, volunteering at the Aurora Food Pantry, for instance, as well as what became Pickering College's in-house program Field to Fork, which imparts practical culinary skill to students.

"Everyone needs to eat, so you might as well do it up well and if people know how to do it, they will use it forever," he says.

Adam is expected to receive his Gold Award from a member of the Royal Family at a Toronto ceremony in September. While the particular member of the Royal Family hasn't yet been announced, his family has heard rumblings it could be the Duchess of Cambridge. Adam is rooting for a close encounter with The Queen.

"Seeing the Queen would be wild, and it would be a good picture!" he says.

At the moment, though, he is focused on Friday, which will see him get up in front of the school to deliver his valedictory speech. As the guy who will be representing his class, he says he wants to send them off on a good note.

"Chairs are going to be full, tensions are going to be high, emotions are going to be wild, and I am going to need to give a good goodbye speech," he says, noting he is heading to St. Francis Xavier University in the fall to study business. "It is a whole new adventure. I want to sell stuff. I think I am pretty good at persuading people, but that has yet to be determined, and I think that's what university is going to bring: a solidified answer."