

Local students have brush with royalty ahead of Coronation



In the days leading up to the Coronation, local students from St. Andrew's College had a brush with royalty as the Duke of Edinburgh's Awards program marked its 60th anniversary in Canada.

The awards program, which was founded by the late Prince Philip as a way for students to stay active, discover themselves, and give back to the communities they call home, is now spearheaded by Prince Edward, the King's youngest brother, who now bears the ducal title.

Students Brandon Chen, David Yang, and Matteo Cericola, who are among the youth currently going through the program, took part in events in Toronto that not only marked the award's anniversary but connected and celebrated participants from coast to coast.

The week kicked off with a presentation of the Gold Awards, the top level in the ?Duke of Ed? hosted by Lieutenant-Governor Elizabeth Dowdeswell at Queen's Park. Following the presentations, Prince Edward led youth in a summit alongside the King's representative in Ontario.

?The youth summit, from my point of view, was a gathering of a lot of like-minded individuals from across Canada in a conference room; the one word I would use to describe it was a ?collective' of experiences,? says Brandon, who has finished his Silver level and is now working his way towards the Gold. ?Prior to this conference, I always thought of the Duke of Ed as a very individualistic experience but this opened up my eyes to see that there are so many other individuals across the country who have the same goals and aspirations as I do and that I am not alone in my journey.?

The feeling of being a part of a ?collective? is shared by David, who said the conference was a chance for them to take notes, hear about different experiences, and make suggestions on how the program could be improved.

?There was a lot of diversity among the people on the day of the conference. Although all of us had the same goal of pursuing the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and also pursuing excellence, all of us were in different situations and all of us had to kind of work through those situations to achieve the same goal and it opened my eyes to? you might be put into different situations than others, but everyone still has the same ability and similar chances to be able to complete whatever they're going for and whatever challenges they take on.?

Ahead of the conference, David says he was ?nervous? about meeting the newly-minted Duke of Edinburgh but said he was struck by how ?down to earth? he was and in how comfortable he was ?keeping the conversation going and chatting in a tone that us

students would be more comfortable with.?

?He was able to sustain his presence within our conversations and, at the same time, he was able to stand out as a leader and guide us through and also look for our perspectives,? says David.

Adds Brandon: ?I had never met a prince before. What should I do? Should I bow? Shake his hand? Before he came to our table I had an uptight attitude, but when he actually sat down and started to engage in conversation, I found that he was just a human being like all of us. He was asking us questions, guiding the conversation, giving his input; he wasn't talking the entire time and allowed us to give our input and he listened. That really surprised me because I thought someone of that stature wouldn't necessarily be so open to hearing our ideas. It was a really eye-opening experience chatting with Prince Edward.?

Matteo, a member of St. Andrew's Pipes and Drums, had a slightly different experience with the Duke of Edinburgh, with his talents put to good use as he piped the late Queen's son into a gala dinner. Introduced to the Duke of Ed program by Brandon, Matteo describes it as ?a way to present to the world that you're well-rounded and prove yourself to be a well-rounded individual.?

?It's very important for growth and development of character ? and in every aspect of your life,? he shares.

Brandon agrees that taking part has been a chance to show not only others but himself that he is a ?well-rounded citizen? with volunteer opportunities, skills building, physical recreation, and undertaking an ?adventurous journey,? a key component in the program.

?Now that I am on my Gold and I have been consistently logging in hours for the past few years now, I feel I learned a lot about myself in regards to my time management and how consistent I can stay with my habits ? the good ones and the bad ones,? he says. ?I have been trying to improve myself through the skills I targeted in the online record book and I feel time management and consistency were the two main skills I learned through the awards program. It is a really special program because unlike other programs, it really opens up to individuals of all different backgrounds and interests. I feel students with varying interest can all participate in the award and it really prepares you and sets you up well for the challenges that you will face in the future, whether that be reaching a deadline in school or getting cut from a sports team, to trying out or auditioning for specific bands.?

Adds David: ?It gets you prepared for later in life. The huge thing about the award is it gave me the opportunities to take opportunities I otherwise wouldn't have taken. For someone who is really focused at school I never thought about doing more than I needed to, to achieve success at school only. After that, I learned it is quite important to be more well-rounded rather than just focusing on one thing.?

The Duke of Edinburgh Award program is open to young people between the ages of 14 and 24 and is based on the principle that looking outside the traditional boundaries of formal education, much can be discovered about the self through discovering "hidden talents", in developing "untapped leadership potential" and making a difference in the community.

For more information, visit dukeofed.org.

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