

Excellence theme for winners

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Top marks are the way to win a Governor General's Academics Medal, but for this year's winners, academic excellence is just one part of the equation.

As in previous years, this year's recipients of the award excel academically, but all five go beyond with their involvement in extra-curricular activities ranging from sports to community service.

Erika Prebushewski, Marina Fellenz, Samantha Kampman, Samantha Rae Barker and Geoffrey Lister — all 2009 graduates — were awarded the medal that was created by Lord Dufferin, Canada's third Governor General after Confederation, to encourage academic excellence across the country, given to students graduating with the highest marks.

Geoff Lister, a graduate of Clarence Fulton secondary school, said he has always found school easy, so he looks for ways of pushing the boundaries.

"As someone with the attention span of a gnat, I'm always looking for the next challenge," he said. "For me, that has meant finding the outer edges of what I dedicate my time to."

"I think that my drive comes from the fact that I know I can do what I set my mind to, even if that means working harder to achieve the same results."

Fulton principal Malcolm Reid said Lister's qualities are recognized not just by teachers, but also by his fellow students.

"Geoff is as complete a secondary student as any I've had the pleasure of working with," said Reid. "Geoff was a major part of Fulton life, and is a personable, hard-working young man who is respected by all staff and students."

Lister said his life has been influenced by too many good people to name, but said his mom deserves particular credit.

"Also the wonderful people running Global Education and dramatic arts programs, and English teachers who challenged me to write well and think critically about the world around me," he said.

High school memories that Lister looks back on with fondness include honing his photography skills and sitting behind a lighting board.

"They would sit high atop the list had it not been for a five-month upheaval from monotony called Global Education," he said. "High school students generally learn a collection of interesting and yet collectively irrelevant facts throughout five years of education. Global Education taught little material, but instead focused on the most important aspect about learning of all, how to think."

"It challenged me to engage with my community and to think beyond the passionate ideas and to see a broader view of what it means to learn."

Lister has always had a passion for music. And, catching the theatre bug in Grade 10 led to Lister's involvement with school theatre and lighting design at Vernon Alliance Church and the Vernon and District Performing Arts Centre.

Now at the University of British Columbia, where he is pursuing a bachelor of commerce, Lister hopes to specialize in marketing and eventually work as a photographer and open a recording studio on the Coast with a business partner.

"I will miss family and friends in Vernon, but I am looking forward to how life unfolds," he said.

For Charles Bloom graduate Erika Prebushewski, the encouragement of family and friends has gone a long way towards her success.

"I give a lot of credit to my parents, Tony and Helen, for supporting me and believing in me, as well as my boyfriend, Mike Verhage," she said. "They are perfect role models of what hard work

and determination stand for. I also thank my teachers for helping me along the way.

"I have always believed that I am capable of accomplishing anything I set my mind to."

Bloom principal Ken Gatzke said Prebushewski and her family have done much to contribute to the community.

"I've known Erika since Grade 8 and had the pleasure of working with her in making our school a better place," he said. "She is just that outstanding student that any school would be proud to have."

Prebushewski counts her grad year as one of her fondest of high school, and is grateful to have participated in events such as the grad fashion show.

"It allowed us to bond as a whole before we went our separate ways," she said. "Bloom is also really good about promoting school spirit and bringing everyone together with events such as March Madness. I value the experience of being part of a smaller school."

Growing up, Prebushewski participated in volleyball and soccer, as well as volunteering to coach a preschool soccer team and taking part in the annual Run for the Cure for breast cancer research.



Prebushewski



Lister

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Her involvement in a youth group resulted in travelling in 2005 to Mexico for a two-week mission trip to build a home for a family in need, as well as working in an orphanage.

Prebushewski said while academic excellence is important, family is always her top priority.

"My family raised me with strong values and has shown me the importance of maintaining a healthy balance in lifestyle," she said. "I try to prioritize what is most important, keeping in mind that although I want to succeed academically and be successful in the future, family comes first, and being a part of my community and helping out where I can is rewarding. When things mean enough to someone, they make the time for them no matter what."

Now attending Okanagan College in Vernon, Prebushewski is enrolled in a two-year business diploma program, which will lead to the four-year degree program in interior design at Kwantlen University. She's hoping to eventually head up her own company or work for a well-known corporation.

"I will miss seeing my close friends on a regular basis, but I am definitely excited to have closed that chapter in my life and opened a new one," she said. "I am prepared and have been looking forward to beginning my life and career for some time now."

W.L. Seaton grad Marina Fellenz expects a lot from herself and hates to disappoint herself and others, including teachers.

"I would rather undertake fewer things and do them properly than do more things sloppily," she said. "I also have a bit of a competitive nature, so even though I tried not to compete too much with other students, I have always wanted to do better than I have done previously."

Seaton principal Mike Bell said Fellenz set high standards for herself.

"She is best known by teachers who acknowledge her focus on being the best she can be," said Bell. "She expected things to be the best and if they weren't, she had no trouble letting you know."

Fellenz credits her parents for providing an environment that encouraged success at school.

"My parents managed to make it mandatory to do all of my schoolwork well, without ever giving me unnecessary pressure," she said.

Fellenz' teachers along the way have also contributed to her academic success. And she credits her classmates at Seaton, who never made her feel like a "nerd."

"This made it easier to be successful because I didn't have to worry about what everyone else thought of me," she said.

Fondest high school memories include playing in school bands, which included trips to Cuba, Disneyland, Edmonton and Idaho.

She also played soccer for 12 years, ran a half-marathon and plays piano up to a Grade 9 Royal Conservatory of Music level. She also found time to take part in four trips with Medical Ministry International.

While Fellenz admits she's not the best time-manager, she said not watching TV, nor spending excess time on the computer, went a long way towards freeing up her time.

"Those two things can, really suck a lot of time out of your day if you're not careful," she said. "I've also found that you make time for the things that are important."

Now at Queen's University, Fellenz is working

on a bachelor of science, with an eye towards majoring in either biochemistry or chemistry, which she'll follow with a master's degree or in her parents' footsteps by attending medical school.

"I also plan on doing an around-the-world trip at some point in the near future."

Vernon secondary school principal Morris Vardabasso said Samantha Kampman is a well-rounded student who not only excels in academics, but also in her extra-curricular activities.

"She is very well-rounded, played sax in the band, chair of grad committee, was a candy striper," he said. "We take some responsibility for the work of the kids, but at the end of the day, it's down to the parents who value education that gets these kids to where they are."

Kampman said her determination to succeed has been present for as long as she can remember.

"My parents always encouraged me, and my teachers always challenged me," she said. "I have always been driven by my own competitive streak as well."

What she calls "amazing, helpful and supportive" teachers at VSS made sure high school was both fun and interesting. She gives particular credit to science and chemistry teacher Charles Stewart, who challenged her to keep inquiring and to pursue her love of science. And John Keeley, her math teacher, for his support and encouragement.

Kampman also held down a part-time job, played soccer, took part in drama productions and canvassed for charity.

"Managing my time has always been one of my biggest struggles," she said. "Balancing a healthy lifestyle with studying and socializing is easier said than done."

"Basically I've had to learn to deal with stress, and to not get so uptight about things. When you sit down to work, you have to focus and just do it, instead of worrying about everything else that needs to get done."

Currently studying at the University of Alberta, working towards a bachelor of science, Kampman misses high school, along with the close relationships she formed with teachers and classmates.

"I haven't narrowed down exactly what I would like to do, however I have always had an interest in medicine or law. I'm hoping to discover my true passion here at school."

Kalamalka grad Samantha Rae Barker is currently enrolled in the Faculty of Arts at UBC in Vancouver.

"I plan to get my bachelor of arts in political science and then my MBA law degree specializing in corporate or international law," said Barker.

Kalamalka principal Don Balcombe calls Barker a strong English and math student.

"It's always nice to hear wonderful things about these kids," he said.

"I'm always amazed at how well-rounded these students are, you'd think in the number of years we've been handing out these awards, one would slide by who wasn't well-rounded, but it just doesn't happen."

"Samantha has a real strong self-determination to get where she wanted to go. She put in over 150 hours of community service. She did it in a quiet way, it was always about her helping people, not about making her look good."



Kampman



Fellenz



Barker