

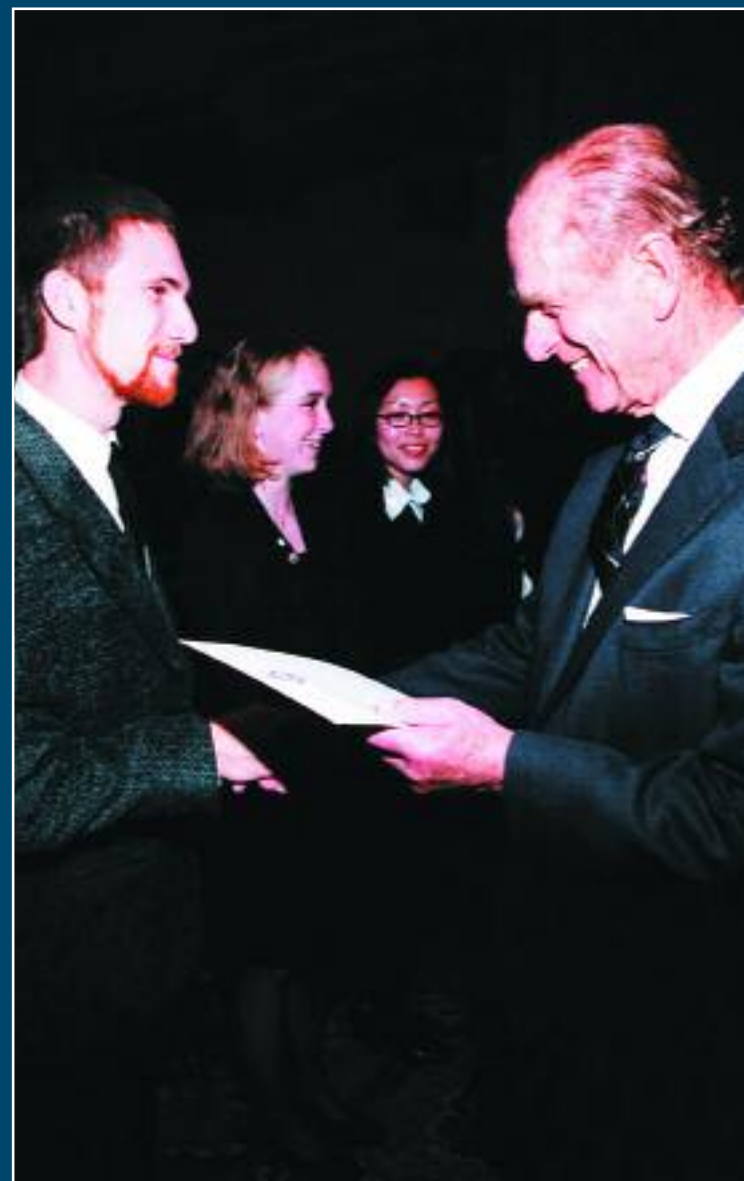


THE DUKE OF EDINBURGH'S AWARD

INVESTING IN YOUNG CANADIANS

A JOINT VENTURE PUBLISHED BY THE GLOBE AND MAIL

■ Self-Esteem ■ Self-Reliance ■ Self-Confidence ■ Perseverance ■ Community Involvement
■ Social Responsibility ■ Initiative ■ Creativity ■ Teamwork ■ Leadership



A personal challenge of leadership, inspiration and fun

A life of public acceptance, let alone acclaim, wasn't exactly beckoning to Thompson Egbo-Egbo in the tough Regent Park district of Toronto where he was a hard-scrabble adolescent without a cause.

Just before his 14th birthday, however, a program he'd never heard of came to the neighbourhood, one which would make all the difference.

"I don't know what drew me to it," says Egbo-Egbo, 21. "I had no idea what it was about."

It turned out to be a program for youth started in 1956 and now being employed in over 115 countries around the world. The Duke of Edinburgh's Award program that Egbo-Egbo encountered has been called by its founder HRH Prince Philip, "a do-it-yourself growing up kit," one in which the four key sections of community service, skills, physical recreation and adventurous journey are pursued in a completely individual, non-competitive way for recognition.

"I was fortunate that the program worked for me," says Egbo-Egbo, today a jazz pianist completing his music diploma at Humber College and a young man who has performed before the Royal Family on their visits to Canada. "A lot of the things we were doing, I had never done before, had never been exposed to."

"Everything in the program relates to everything I'm doing now. I'm still learning, I'm still doing community work, I'm still getting out on expeditions. It's great to understand myself in a better way, to see how I can give, how I can be useful."

With 30,000 Canadian youth between ages 14 and 25 enrolled in a year, and almost six million others around the world who have been participants over the last 50 years, the Award has remained remarkably close to its original conception in encouraging personal discovery and growth, self-reliance, perseverance, responsibility and service to the community.

"It's non-competitive nature is very important



The Award's National President, Kevin Malone, centre, with Award Participants from the Royal Canadian Air Cadets.



Gold Award Participant Thompson Egbo-Egbo.

here," says Kevin Malone, Managing Director of BMO Nesbitt Burns Inc., and National President of the Award program in Canada and himself a Gold Award achiever. "It isn't a race. It's very inclusive. This Award hasn't changed since its inception in terms of the ground rules."

The four previously mentioned sections pertain at Bronze, Silver and Gold levels of the

Award. Skills can be the pursuit of any hobby or interest, but here recorded and accounted for. Community service is volunteer contribution that creates a sense of personal and community responsibility. Physical recreation promotes health and self-esteem. Adventurous Journeys are teamwork adventures in new places.

"For any young person, The Award presents a fantastic opportunity either to develop activities [they are] already involved in or to try new activities," says Prince Edward, The Earl of Wessex and Chair of the international program, as well as a Gold Award achiever. "Yes, it is a challenge, but it wouldn't be worth anything if it wasn't. More importantly, it is a personal challenge, it's about what interests and inspires you and it's fun! At the end of it you get an Award which is a recognition of your achievement."

"The Award's challenge," continues Prince Edward in a communication from London, "is to present all young people with that opportunity — whether or not they get involved should be their decision. To achieve that we need the help and understanding of adults working with young people whether they be parents, teachers, youth workers, coaches, employers, probation officers, community leaders and so on."

"The Award is a proven program which can help you develop a young person's passions and character and ultimately help them achieve an Award which has national and international recognition."

Indeed, Ontario alone has something on the order of 1,000 volunteers ranging from school teachers and community centre coordinators to Scout leaders, notes Malone.

Meanwhile, a key development in the Canadian Award program came nearly 10 years ago with the creation of The Charter for Business. The Charter not only brought in critical private-sector support for the program but lent it a robust dimension of outreach to disadvantaged youth in settings like Aboriginal and rural communities, inner-city neighbourhoods, detention facilities or anywhere they



HRH The Earl of Wessex, International Chairman of The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, and Toronto Mayor David Miller are both Gold Award Achievers.

were coping with physical disabilities or other challenges.

"This program is available to all youth ages 14 to 25," underlines Rick Ashbee, National Executive Director of the Award program. "It's a self-challenge and it can be adapted to anyone and everyone."

Already working with organizations like the Girl Guides of Canada and Scouts Canada, the Award is now forging a more formal relationship with Cadets Canada through a pilot project in Atlantic Canada and looks to the possibility of more such strategic alliances.

The conviction propelling the effort, and winning such partnerships, is invariably echoed by all those who have gone through the program. In the same city as Egbo-Egbo, another Toronto resident shares his thoughts on the experience of becoming a Gold Award achiever.

"I was proud to be acknowledged for my

hard work, community service and athletic skills," recounts David Miller, Mayor of the City of Toronto. I was also honoured to have the award presented by The Duke of Edinburgh himself.

"The Award program taught me a great deal about leadership and community service. I also developed a real love of nature and lifelong commitment to physical fitness."

Mayor Miller has noted the growth of the Award's presence through the outreach support of The Charter for Business and a recently-created TD Waterhouse Investing in Youth Initiative which is focusing on disadvantaged youngsters in Toronto and other major cities across the country.

"The Duke of Edinburgh's Award has been expanding across the city," Miller affirms. "There are many young people who can learn valuable lessons about self-discipline and setting goals through this program."