

Young Leaders in Rural Canada Awards Recipients

On October 22, 2004, the Government of Canada, through its *Young Leaders in Rural Canada Awards* recognized exceptional achievements and contributions by young Canadians. The Awards highlight rural youth who dedicate their passion, spirit and skills to the benefit of rural, remote and northern communities throughout Canada.

Awards were given to three individuals who have made an outstanding contribution to their rural communities in the following categories:

- INNOVATION:** Developing an innovative and trend-setting initiative which can include a new approach or dimension to projects, introduction of a novel approach to deal with a long-standing issue or drawing on assets of the community in a different way.
- LEADERSHIP:** Demonstrating leadership through concrete outcomes and strong commitment and contribution, leading groups to take up projects with significant impact on the community, demonstrating effective use of personal qualities and community assets in achieving goals.
- PARTNERSHIP:** Creating partnerships among community groups, building cooperative relationships between people and strengthening the notion that teamwork is valued, facilitating relationships by fostering cooperation between groups, promoting new ways of working together.
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INNOVATION

Recipient: **Jim Rutten**
Lake Ainslie, Nova Scotia

When Jim Rutten moved to Lake Ainslie in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia less than two years ago, he knew he wanted to be involved in community development.

“I had made a conscious decision to move here, and when I did, I started looking at all the resources available in the community,” says the 27-year-old who was born on a farm in southwestern Ontario. “Contrary to what most people think, this is a very exciting time for rural communities. Because of the challenges they face, they have to get organized which provides great opportunities to young people.”

After arriving in the area, he realized that the last fifty years of changes in agriculture had left a large number of abandoned farms in the region. When he learned that 95% of the food found in Cape Breton stores was actually coming from out of the area, he decided to address the issue by creating interest for revitalizing agriculture in the community.

His initiative is based on five innovative agriculture projects from across the country. One is Community Shared Agriculture where local households purchase subscription shares of the year's harvest from a local farm. This provides the start-up capital necessary for farmers to purchase the supplies they need. Another project is linking landowners and farmers through land leasing. It connects people who have land, but don't want to or can't farm, with people who want to farm but have no land.

While these types of initiatives already exist in other communities, this is the first time they will all be combined as a co-operative like Rutten is doing. His approach gets agricultural producers and processors, restaurateurs, landowners and consumers involved in a system that adds value to their work and promotes agriculture products. Rutten's innovative approach is also educating the community and promoting diversified agriculture and healthy food. Through a series of workshops, a food festival and a new farmer's market in the community, Rutten hopes to reconnect youth with the land, and raise awareness of the importance of fresh produce for all.



LEADERSHIP

Recipient: **Corey T. Parsons**
Fortune, Newfoundland and Labrador

Corey T. Parsons encompasses the spirit of leadership in his hometown of Fortune, Newfoundland and Labrador. His passion for his community and its citizens led him to use his leadership skills to identify new resources and partners for the people of the area.

Corey's efforts have led to the development of new skills and knowledge within his community, as well as many new employment opportunities. His dedicated work resulted in the injection of nearly three quarters of a million dollars into the local economy, creating more than 70 part-time positions and over 25,000 hours of employment.

"When I moved back to Fortune, after being in a city for a while, I realized that the community depended on people like me to step up to the plate," explains Parsons. "With the aging population in rural regions, it's a great time for youth to take more active roles in their communities. That is just what I did."

His dedication to numerous causes has benefitted all citizens in the community. Corey has a passion for all kinds of sport. He held important positions on the 2003 Burin Peninsula Summer Games Management Committee, which included nearly 2,000 youth participants and 300

volunteers. He also initiated the first Annual Recreation Hockey Tournament and serves as the vice-president of the Men's Recreation Hockey League. As well, he is a member of the Lake Academy Playground Committee, is a minor hockey coach and a volunteer Fire Fighter.

Understanding that rural communities face challenges, he has also spearheaded successful workshops and public meetings on topics ranging from seniors' issues to vandalism. His commitment to improving the quality of life in his community also made him an excellent coordinator for special events such as the Winter Carnival, the Summer Festival, the Waterfront Festivities, the Fall Exhibition and the Targa Newfoundland car challenge.

However, Corey's greatest achievement has been his leadership in the completion of his hometown's multi-purpose facility, left unfinished twelve years ago. Understanding the importance of such infrastructure to his community, he took the lead in finding partners to secure the required funding to complete the facility. Today, the state of the art multi-purpose facility houses tennis, ball hockey and basketball courts, which are well used by the citizens of all ages.

"It's true that community leadership can be overwhelming at first, but I urge young people to give it a try," continues Parsons. "That is how I started getting involved. I just gave it a try and saw the results. Now, I am building on these successes and today, more than ever, I believe in the future of rural communities."

Through Parsons' skills, community involvement and activities, he has inspired people to develop and show initiative, as well as exercise their full potential.



PARTNERSHIP

Recipient: Jason Mandes
Flin Flon, Manitoba

Jason Mandes has been working with the People First Group, a community inclusion program for people with developmental disabilities, for the past three years. Over that time, Jason has learned the value of positive role models and community development.

"I realize how fortunate I am and I want to help those who haven't been as lucky. If everybody put in just a little bit of effort, it would mean so much to those that need it," says the 25-year-old who was born in Flin Flon, Manitoba.

The People First Group has approximately 30 members from the Flin Flon area who live with developmental disabilities such as fetal alcohol syndrome, Down syndrome and cerebral palsy. "It's a good feeling to see them smiling and to know that they are so appreciative of any effort that's put forth. It's all about creating awareness and integrating people with disabilities into the community."

In his personal time, Jason has a passion for hockey. Every year, he organizes a benefit hockey game that supports the *People First Group*. Jason is responsible for finding sponsors, advertising, organizing the fundraisers (50/50 draw, raffles and a puck toss) and finding volunteers. Jason includes the People First members in many aspects of the charity game – from selling and taking tickets, to greeting people at the door. Over the past three years, the People First Benefit Hockey Game has raised over \$1,200 to fund travel to out of town conferences.

Jason continues to forge new community partnerships by organizing activities that benefit both individuals and the community as a whole. “This isn’t a one-man gig,” he said. “I get overwhelming support from my teammates. Without The Oil Hockey Club (Jason’s recreational hockey team) none of this would be possible.” At the beginning of last season, the team decided to have a food drive called “Goals for Cans”. The team agreed to donate a can of food for each goal the team lost by. In the end, 120 cans of food went to the Lord’s Bounty Food Bank.

At Christmas, Jason organized a fundraiser/hockey tournament called, “Top-Shelf for Toys”. More than 100 toys and cash were donated to the Children’s Gift Program - a program established in order to make sure that every child gets something to open on Christmas morning. “I couldn’t believe how many toys were donated. It’s good to know that people are willing to support each other during the holiday season.”

Jason is currently the Program/Events Coordinator at the Flin Flon Friendship Center where he helps promote awareness and understanding of Aboriginal culture by initiating, coordinating and implementing various programs and activities.