

Recipients of the second Young Leaders in Rural Canada Awards (YLRCA)

The Government of Canada, through its Young Leaders in Rural Canada Awards, recognized exceptional achievements and contributions by young Canadians during an Award Ceremony held on November 21, 2005 evening. The annual awards highlight rural youth who dedicate their passion, spirit and skills to the benefit of rural, remote and northern communities.

For the second YLRCA, three commemorative awards and three honorary mention certificates were given to individuals who have contributed to their 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.



INNOVATION Recipient

Dylan Green
Tofino, British Columbia

At the age of 24, when most young people are leaving their small communities in favour of fast-paced careers in the city, Dylan Green knew that he wanted to live in an area that allowed him to balance work and play.

“I moved to Tofino first for a job and second for the year-round open ocean surf. The beautiful setting convinced me right away, I wanted to live here” affirms Green. “The challenge was finding a job throughout the year, so I started to think of ways I could generate some income for myself.”

Tofino, a community of 1,500, is known for its location next to the Pacific Rim National Park Reserve and within the Clayoquot Sound UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. The international recognition added to Tofino’s shift from being a resource dependent community to a growing tourism destination.

With his intuitive business sense, Green recognized the limitations to the current transportation services and began to envision a public transportation service that would bring in more tourists to the region. He soon discovered that moving into the scheduled bus industry was not an easy task, as licences are controlled by the province and heavily regulated. A strong identified need for a second bus line also had to be demonstrated. Thriving on challenges, Green canvassed residents, tourists and small businesses, developing partnerships with adventure tourism companies, hostels, hotels and other businesses in the town and region. His efforts had paid off and Tofino Bus was established in 2002.

Through his hard work, Tofino Bus had evolved into a flourishing business with passenger demand growing from almost 400 per month to over 2,000 during the summer season. In 2004, the company moved from a seasonal to a year-round operation with a fleet of five vans. Today, Tofino Bus operates with a fleet of 8 buses, most of which are 24 passenger mini coaches. In addition, Tofino Bus has recently become the school bus operator for both Tofino and Ucluelet , operating five school buses a day. Although his achievements in business were inspiring to a number of up-and-coming entrepreneurs, Green's innovativeness was still to come.

Green recognized that the tourism industry is completely dependent upon the unspoiled natural environment of Clayoquot Sound. One of the ironies of the company was that it was going to add to the existing environmental pressures. Understanding his responsibility to the health of the environment, Green began to research alternative fuels for use and by the summer season, he had found a relatively new product - biodiesel. Made from renewable sources (vegetable oil, animal fats) and whose emissions, unlike regular diesel, are not carcinogenic or harmful to the ozone, biodiesel results in dramatically lower levels of pollutants.

"When I first heard that you could run diesel engines on vegetable oil I could hardly believe it," explains Green. "I was instantly curious and started researching the nearest supply source, which I eventually found in Oregon. Our buses began to operate on a 25% biodiesel mixture. With limited supply available in Canada, we happened to be the first scheduled bus in Canada to run on biodiesel."

Green's commitment to the sustainability of his community did not end here. He continues to showcase leadership in inspiring the region to improve the environment. As the Director of the Tofino Chamber of Commerce, he has led to the establishment of a working relationship with the Clayoquot Biosphere Trust, which manages the biosphere's associated federal trust, and guided the Chamber in a grant application to study the feasibility of a biodiesel production industry on the West Coast that could result in a new sustainable, "green" industry for the region.

"I am pleased that my contributions will have a positive and long-lasting effect for my community," adds Green. "The most satisfying part of Tofino Bus is to see how it has grown to be a staple service for the communities; contributing to the economy and preserving the environmental health of the region."

INNOVATION

Honourary Mention

Joël Delisle
St-Gilles de Lotbinière (Quebec)

As a trained First Responder and firefighter, Joël Delisle realized when he first moved to St-Gilles de Lotbinière eight years ago that the local ambulance service took an average of 30 to 45 minutes to reach the scene of an accident.



Understanding full well the impact of such slow response times on the community and its residents, he did not hesitate to get involved to rectify that situation. “I knew that even three minutes of cardiac arrest can cause major damage, so I decided to put my training to good use and start a First Responder Service to cover the entire municipality and finally solve this problem.”

Following two years of efforts, negotiations and dealings with the municipality, local ambulance services, the volunteer firefighters and the *Régie de la santé et des services sociaux du Québec*, the St-Gilles First Responder Service officially went into operation on January 1, 2004. The team currently consists of 15 community volunteers, 3 of which are volunteer firefighters and 12 are civilians who have received First Responder training. This pioneering service is a real success story and is the envy of neighbouring municipalities. It is expected that similar first responder services will be established in other rural communities across Quebec.

LEADERSHIP

Recipient

Miguel LeBlanc
Scoudouc, New Brunswick



“If we could only stop a minute and listen, really listen, to what youth are saying, people would be amazed by what they’re hearing.”

Coming from the small Acadian community of Scoudouc, New Brunswick, Miguel LeBlanc understands the opportunities and challenges that rural life holds for youth. But when he looks in young people’s eyes, he gets more than a glimpse of the community’s future, he sees the community’s present.

“But we need to get them involved ... now, not tomorrow, he explains. Youth need to be engaged in their community, in their governments, their voices need to be heard.” But for that to happen, adults need to listen. LeBlanc has made this task the focus of his work as a Community Coordinator at the New Brunswick Advisory Council on Youth.

“Adults and youth don’t necessarily speak the same language, he explains, but that doesn’t mean we can’t communicate.” Thanks to his education and experience as a social worker, LeBlanc has been able to take a pro-active role in facilitating intergenerational sessions in rural communities across the province.

Following a public consultation with youth in the Acadian Peninsula, LeBlanc went beyond the call of duty when he realized that bullying was a major problem in schools in the region. He organized a joint session, with both youth and adults, was able to flag this issue as a community problem, and initiate action.

Creating links between youth and adults has also been a focus of his work in the aboriginal community of Burnt Church. He formed a committee of adults and youth, who learn how to communicate with each other while looking at initiatives to benefit their community. He joined the Youth Action Network, which supports youth in the fight against youth homelessness and youth “at risk” issues in New Brunswick, and is involved with the Menswork Network for Change, which promotes male youth’s involvement in the fight against family violence.

Whether it be through his work as voluntary groups’ member, youth events coordinator or community consultation facilitator, Miguel LeBlanc plays a key role in addressing some of the most important issues facing rural youth in the province. According to him, the future of rural communities lies in the possibility of adults and youth engaging in productive dialogue, and learning from each other. He certainly does his part in making this happen.

LEADERSHIP

Honourary Mention

Jason Leonard
Whitehorse, Yukon

When Jason Leonard first attended Yukon College he knew he faced some challenges, but armed with his positive outlook and a commitment to bettering his future and that of his community, he was willing to set out and make a change.



Like many youth coming from northern rural communities, the exposure to serious issues with substance abuse is common. Attending the college is one way in which youth take the first step to reaching their goals. “If they don’t have reading and writing skills and could be affected by drug and alcohol abuse, they know that others have faced similar situations and there is a place to go where they can get peer support and guidance,” notes Leonard.

As a new student dealing with sobriety issues and limited literacy skills, Leonard realized that one of the best strategies for working through his challenges was to provide resources for himself as well as other young people who wanted to succeed academically while coping with an addiction issue. "A simple thing like opening up an area to interact with people in a more positive environment goes a long way to giving youth the opportunity to make a change," adds Leonard. Taking the initiative to bring about peer support and networking functions, implementing several programs on campus such as weekly Alcoholics Anonymous sessions, and spending his personal time opening up the college's gym to offer recreational activities as an alternative choice, are but a few examples of Leonard's contributions. Through his commitment to community initiatives, Leonard expresses his optimism for his own future and for small towns across northern Canada.



PARTNERSHIP

Recipient

Mallory Statham

Powell River, British Columbia

"We must look inward to ourselves for the solutions to our world's problem and not wait for someone else to fix them, for someone else to change, or for someone else to give in," affirms Mallory Statham, one of rural Canada's young leaders of today and tomorrow.

Growing up in a resource-dependent community, Statham has seen and felt the acute effect of job losses to a small community. With individuals leaving to find jobs elsewhere, the numbers in her community had dropped resulting in lower school enrollment and eventually leading to closures and amalgamations. This had a negative effect on students' morale and motivation. At fifteen, Statham became aware of her community's dropout, teen pregnancy and substance use rates. She wanted to address some of the root causes of substance abuse, and felt that awareness and expansion of existing alternatives would help local youth in making safer choices.

Statham discovered the Youth Ambassadors Program, which opened doors around the community and supported her and others in developing leadership skills. She then signed on with Public Health as Leader of the Youth Advisory Council (YAC). Her mandate was to encourage youth to be involved in new activities where they could make new friends, learn about themselves and make a difference. She forged new community partnerships with municipal government, school authorities, the business community and her peers to network with existing organizations to broaden and expand youth initiatives and increase the awareness of challenges faced by youth.

One of many examples where Statham and her YAC have demonstrated their commitment to improving opportunities for youth was the initiation of the community's first "Youth Music Idol". Guided by the Municipal Leisure Services - who provided the professional help, the facility and the advertising - YAC coordinated this event, encouraging the Academy of Music to provide

voice and stage coaching to participants. A rewarding and fun experience for individuals and the community, this event is now held annually providing free music training and increased confidence for young musicians, continued funding for the YAC initiatives, enhancing community pride and showcasing some of the many talents of Powell River's youth. "Youth programs not only help young people," Statham adds, "it also helps the volunteers and community members, giving them a better understanding of youth issues and helping to develop lasting relationships."

People were taking notice of Statham's abilities in leadership and building lasting relationships. She was approached by the Road Sense Team of the Insurance Corporation of B.C. to assist in reaching their youth market in educating them on the negative impacts of substance abuse. Statham submitted a two-year plan that employed networking to initiate events in both the community and the schools. Having gained their confidence, the Road Sense Team budgeted to fund her efforts to create a school-based CARS (Counter Act Road Safety) B.C. club. Bringing together school authorities, regional insurance staff, the provincial Ministry of Highways, three emergency services and a number of other organizations, Statham successfully managed to get buy-in from all stakeholders to hold a mock crash event. Students received a sobering presentation on the consequences of driving while under the influence. To underscore the message to make safer choices, Statham was a member of the organizational team that fundraised and coordinated substance-free grad events, a community effort that continues to influence the decisions youth in Powell River are making today.

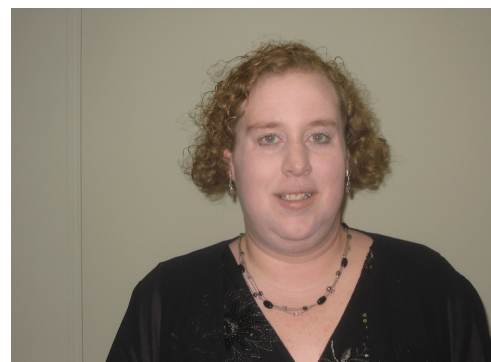
Working through the challenges and creating her own opportunities, Statham's initiatives have improved her life in a measurable way and that of her rural community. Though she is now attending university, she continues to be an active advocate for rural youth as a member of the university's recruiting department. Amongst other activities, this department coordinates an annual Connect Camp that aims to bridge the gap between promising rural high school students and post-secondary educational opportunities. From the university campus, she also mentored a local tenth grade student in establishing the first Youth Opportunity Fair in their hometown. The event brought all manner of youth organizations into the school to present over 200 eighth and ninth grade students with an array of extra-curricular options to fit all interests.

PARTNERSHIP

Honourary Mention

Lana Cowling-Mason
Warren, Manitoba

Through hard work, dedication and excellent leadership skills Lana Cowling-Mason was able to help bring many projects in the Woodlands area to fruition. By earning the trust of local councillors and community volunteers, the Regional Municipality of Woodlands Community Development Corporation was able to implement many successful projects such as housing studies, feasibility studies and a Web page development strategy.



Lana manages small-scale loans to local entrepreneurs starting a business where she facilitates partnerships, from planning to implementation stage, between entrepreneurs and the community. Through her participation as a member of the Super Six Community Futures Development Corporation (CFDC) Board of Directors and as Chairperson of the Interlake Tourism Association (ITA), Lana saw communities like Warren reap the benefits from the popular "Prairie Dog Central", the vintage passenger train that travels from Winnipeg to Warren and the transformed "Destination: Interlake North Tourist Centre", a redeveloped grain elevator. "Personally, this project has been a tremendous learning experience that has included every aspect of community development," said Lana.

"As is often the case in small communities, Lana wears many hats and the line separating her professional and personal lives is incredibly blurred. As a result, her whole life seems intertwined with that of the community," said Todd Goranson, Community Development Coordinator for the Super Six CFDC. "One is never sure if Lana is chairing a public meeting as the Economic Development Officer, the Chair of ITA, or simply as a caring, dedicated member of the community. Perhaps it is all of these."