

Chinook's Edge graduate Davina Merritt named top student leader in Canada



Davina Merritt, who graduated from Ecole Olds High School in June 2023, has been awarded the Bill Conconi Leadership Award, by the Canadian Student Leadership Association (CSLA). The award goes to one high school student leader in Canada each year, and comes with a \$1,000 scholarship.

“I honestly feel like I am in awe,” said Davina Merritt. “I did some research on past recipients and I am humbled. Mostly, I am grateful for all of the opportunities that I have had that led me to this prestigious award.”

The process of selection for the award involves member schools making nominations to CSLA. One student is selected from each province or territory for a total of 12 students who receive provincial recognition and \$500. Davina Merritt received the Alberta award. From the group of 12, CSLA narrows the selection to three top leadership students and completes interviews with candidates and their teachers. In 2023, CSLA chose Davina Merritt as the recipient of the Bill Conconi Leadership Award.

“Davina is very deserving of this recognition, and the fact she calls Ecole Olds High School home is humbling,” said Meaghan Reist, Principal, Olds High. “When we think of students who truly make change in their school communities, who do so because they love it but also because they know the difference it will make in the lives of others, we think of Davina. Her leadership capacity is natural; she is humble, humorous and hardworking. Our whole community is so proud of Davina.”

Kevin Hronek, a teacher at Olds High, said, “Davina’s commitment to enhancing the lives of others in her school is matched only by her commitment to activities that benefit the larger community. She took advantage of all opportunities her school and community offered including leadership, athletics, dual credit, and fire cadets while remaining on the honor roll and maintaining several part time jobs.”

Louan Statchuk, Olds High teacher and leadership mentor, said, “Davina leads with kindness, care, and compassion. Her actions are an example for others. She is a ‘quiet confident leader’ who listens before taking action. Our school and the community of Olds were fortunate to have a vibrant young citizen such as Davina who was always depended on to lend a helping hand or take the lead.”

Dave Conlon, Program Director, CSLA said his organization selected Merritt because of “her contributions to the community, her consistently positive attitude to making things work, and her ability to bring other students along to make them feel successful, mentoring and encouraging students around her.” Conlon added, “Davina’s advisors consistently mentioned that she willingly did all of these incredible things without looking for recognition or praise.”

Merritt is also the recipient of the Alberta Premier's Citizenship Award, the Rotary "Service Above Self" Award, the Lion's Legacy Award, and the Town of Olds Youth Volunteer of the Year Award. She received a leadership scholarship from the University of Alberta.

Merritt is now a student at the University of Alberta, studying Environmental Studies with a minor in Politics, Society and Global Environment. She dreams of working for Rotary or eventually the United Nations in the organization's environment sector. Regardless of where she lands, Merritt said, **"I hope to continue to be involved in volunteering in some way."**

"My best advice for students who are going into high school is to just get involved," said Merritt. "You are going to have a way better high school experience if you're actively a part of the school culture! You have nothing to lose by trying out different opportunities. You don't have to do everything; the most difficult thing is finding the courage and drive to just start."

Bill Conconi, was a teacher in Victoria, who encouraged his students to make a difference in their schools and local communities. He also made an incredible impact in CSLA and specifically with students and adult leaders involved in CSLA. Conconi was known for his leadership style of leading by doing.



Top right, Davina Merritt with Olds High teacher and leadership advisor, Louan Statchuk. Right, Merritt participated in the Fire Cadets program in Olds and said it was one of her favourite programs to take part in.

Celebrating Chinook's Edge on social media



Chinook's Edge is hoping parents - and members of the broader community - will enjoy an uptick in Facebook use by schools.

Schools have each appointed one 'Social Media Influencer' whose role includes sharing information and pictures of interesting things happening in schools, on Facebook. Social Media Influencers met on September 25 for a kick off meeting at the division office.

"There is incredible learning underway every day in our classrooms," said Kurt Sacher. "Our staff and students are amazing! We want parents and our

communities to enjoy the journey of learning with us, and celebrate all of the good that's happening. We see social media as one additional opportunity to engage with parents and our communities."

In addition to using social media, schools will continue to utilize websites, newsletters, emailed messages and other tools to communicate with families.