

## Didsbury High School's band hits a high note: on its way to compete in national MusicFest



Didsbury High School's Grade 10 to 12 band is on its way to MusicFest - a national music festival - in Toronto this week. The band was invited after performance at a music festival held at Acadia University last spring.

The group that is traveling to Ontario this week includes 75 students and 17 chaperones. The group will be gone from May 14 to 18.

Kirk Wassmer, the band's director, said in his 23 years of teaching music at DHS this is the first time he remembers a Chinook's Edge band going to nationals.

***"It's truly an honour to be invited to this event," said Wassmer. "I am excited for the students to have this experience, and for them to see that it's their hard work and the music that makes it all possible."***

The concert band will play three pieces: *Diamond Tide* by Viet Cuong, *Autumn* by Cait Nishimura, and *Fracas* by Randall Standridge.

***"Diamond Tide is the centerpiece of our program," said Wassmer.*** The composer, said Wassmer, is considered by many to be the sound of the future of music.

The song was inspired by the notion that on the planet Neptune, conditions are right for diamonds to melt, so there could be oceans of liquid diamond and it could also rain diamonds.

***Wassmer said, "The composer has written in sound effects created by interesting uses of instruments such as glasses of water pitched to specific notes, or having small brass discs called crotales suspended and dipped in water so that the pitch is altered. It's quite exciting!"***

Cait Nishimura is a Japanese Canadian composer, and according to Wassmer, **“students love playing her music.”** Randall Standridge is a member of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, **“so our whole program is a nod to underrepresented composers and communicates support for the diversity of people and culture,”** said Wassmer. Standridge’s piece - Fracas - **“lives up to its name”,** said Wassmer.

Wassmer said bands can enter festivals at the 100, 200, 300, 400, 500 or 600 level. The DHS band is playing at a 400 level, **“which is about where they should be or even slightly above for their age. Our students are challenged by this music, but are rising to the occasion.”**

In addition to playing at the festival, the school’s jazz combo called “Minor 6” will play at the Rex Hotel in Toronto, which according to Wassmer, is an iconic jazz venue. Minor 6 will also have the opportunity to play at dinners for invited students during the festival time period. Students will stay in residence at the University of Toronto.

In addition to their music experiences, students will also get to do some sightseeing - with planned tours of Ripley’s Aquarium, the CN Tower, Casa Loma, and Niagara Falls. Students will also get to take in a Blue Jay’s baseball game.

**“Heading to Musicfest - The Nationals - in Toronto, a city I’ll be seeing for the first time, is something that I’ve been looking forward to since the DHS Maritimes Band trip last year,”** said Melina Quintana Solis, a Grade 11 student. **“I’m especially excited to see the Blue Jays vs. Tampa Bay Ray’s game, my first ever professional baseball game. I’m incredibly grateful to be a part of a music program that can go on trips like this. These trips are going to be some highlights of my highschool years.”**

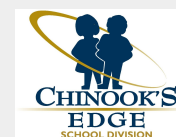
Renata King, a Grade 11 student, said, **“Band opens a lot of doors for anyone who is willing to put in the work and effort. Receiving the invitation to perform nationally is never what one expects when they first pick up their instrument in Grade 5. Getting to be involved in such an exciting occasion makes all the years I’ve dedicated to band worth it. I’m excited to share what we’ve been working on all year with Toronto, and also see what others have been working on as well.”**



**Being able to play at the Rex is the biggest opportunity of my life thus far, and it is truly an honor,”** said Evan Kohut, a Grade 12 student. **“I’ve heard recordings and seen videos from my inspirations, the people I look up to and study, that were made on that stage, and I’m immensely grateful to be able to go up there and be a part of that legacy.”**

**Kohut said, “It’s nerve wracking, following in the footsteps of so many incredible musicians, but it’s also motivating, and I’m confident we’ll put on a show that does the hotel justice. The Rex, along with Toronto’s incredible Jazz scene, are what made me decide to move there for post-secondary, and I hope to play there again soon!”**

Wassmer said this unique opportunity is possible because of many individuals. **“I love teaching in Didsbury because it is a community that really supports their music programs,”** said Wassmer. **“And, I want to send a huge shout out to music teachers at Ross Ford and Westglen School for their work with students in elementary school and middle school. Your hard work makes it so students coming into DHS love band and are ready for the challenge.”**



# Sylvan Lake celebrates the goodness of its youth after successful inaugural “H.J. Cody Gives Back” event

École H.J. Cody High School has successfully completed its first annual “H.J. Cody Gives Back” day. On April 25, for about two hours, the entire school headed out into the community to provide service to the community.

***“We have amazing students and staff and we want our community to see what we see every day,” said Alex Lambert, Principal. “Also, our community has been unbelievably supportive of us - through fundraising and volunteering and just being positive about our school. This is our way of saying thank you! We are fortunate to have a great community and we want them to know just how much we appreciate that.”***



Each grade had its own activity for the day:

- Grade 9 students cleaned up garbage around the lakeshore and community trails
- Grade 10 students ran activities for children at the Nexsource Centre and with the Town of Sylvan Lake Library at our school. They also held a social tea with homemade baked goods for community members
- Grade 11 students collected four trunks worth of food bank items
- Grade 12 students returned to their elementary schools and to École Fox Run School to interact and provide fun opportunities for younger students



***“We had an amazing day,” said Lambert. “The weather was beautiful. Students were amazing representatives of our school in the community, and returned to our school ear-to-ear with smiles. It was heartwarming!”***





On a community Sylvan Lake community Facebook page, one person wrote, ***“Big rave to the grade 10 students from HJ Cody! They put on games for the little kids and they did such a fantastic job of it! They were all hands on, kind, caring, and patient with the little ones. ... my daughter took my son and two other little ones there and she was very impressed with how well the students did... Good job Lakers! I love that these kids are learning about giving back. They should all be proud of themselves!”***

Another community member commented, ***“My son had so much fun! What a great idea to have high school students spend time with littles.”***

One person wrote, ***“The food drive went amazing. We got an incredible amount. The food bank was very happy!! It was awesome. We have a great crop of young people in our town!”***



Another comment mentioned the storytime with the preschool aged children and added, ***“I absolutely LOVE the direction this high school is going and the service the teachers and youth gave to our community today!!!”***

Lambert said, ***“Thank you to the Town of Sylvan Lake for providing us with garbage bags and gloves, and spaces for our service projects, Tim Horton’s for the hot chocolate and cookies, Sobey’s for buns for our barbecue, and the RCMP for spending time with our students too. We appreciate the support and the community connection for students.”***

Lambert said the event was so successful she anticipates it will continue annually.



# Sundre High School celebrates over a half century of success with May Queen



Above (L to R): Grade 11 students: James Catubig, Chase Abernethy, Donavon Liesemer, Meghan Leclair, Bailey Hengen

Sundre High School has just wrapped up the 2024 edition of May Queen... a tradition that goes back 55 years to its inception in 1969. The event involved students completing hundreds of hours of service in the community between May 8 and 11.

***“May Queen is a tradition that students enjoy and our community looks forward to every year,” said Scott Saunders, Principal, Sundre High School. “This event has a way of connecting us and creating a positive energy that spreads throughout our school and into our community, and back to us again.”***

May Queen started out as a way of raising funds for prom and graduation celebrations for students. Every year students approach businesses and individuals in the community to find projects that need to be done, establishing a fundraising amount for each project. May Queen has expanded to include raising funds for field trips and extra curricular activities, and towards scholarships.

Last year, students participating in May Queen raised \$29,000. This year’s tally is still being tabulated.

The event is competitive; each grade competes with the others to see which grade brings in the highest total dollars. In the past there was a “Queen” and King for each grade - thus the name May Queen. Now there are two student leaders for each grade. Because May Queen has been around for so long, competitiveness now extends through generations of families who have participated over the decades.

***“It’s great to get kids out into the community and connected,” said Becky Dziadek, a Sundre High parent and May Queen participant from the 1990’s.***

***“I loved being with friends after school when I was a student,” said Pamela Hengen, a Sundre High parent and former May Queen participant.***



Hengen's mother participated in the first May Queen event, so it is an experience three generations of her family have been involved with. ***"My husband's grade won four years in a row and he still brags about it," she said. "I think it's good for students to meet people in the community."***

Kate Finley, a Grade 12 student, said although her family doesn't have three generations of experience with May Queen, ***"my friend's parents talk about the tradition of May Queen. They get excited about it."***

Finley said the students in her grade have, so far, been undefeated, and acknowledges how the friendly competition adds to May Queen's success and energy. Finley sees other positive benefits too. ***"It teaches you to work with people and be organized. And, it may not sound very fun to rake for four hours, but being with friends and playing music and working... and then eating dinner outside together, it's good. I enjoy it."***

Finley added, ***"I think it's good for the community to meet us. I like that they trust us with their jobs."***

Ryder Dach, a Grade 11 student, said, ***"I think it's good for the community and good for students. It creates a better community. I like that May Queen brings groups of kids together with the community to support the school."***



Tracy Pedersen, an Educational Assistant at Sundre High School, parent and former May Queen participant said, ***"I love the energy of the students and staff, and the community and parents. This definitely affects school spirit. I love to see the students challenging themselves to meet their own goals. It's also great that our teens are seen in a positive light by the community."***

Pedersen said, ***"I appreciate how members of our community save yard work and jobs for May Queen because they want to support our school. I just love the stories of generations of families participating and all the memories."***

Pedersen recalls her own May Queen years. ***"We picked rocks and painted fences. We were exhausted by the end of the week, but I was with friends. We played music and were all laughing and having a good time," she said.***





Pedersen said sometimes students end up on work projects with friends, but also sometimes with students they don't know as well. ***"It helps them develop relationships they might not otherwise have in school."***

Also, Pedersen appreciates that students who may not be top academic or athletic students get a chance to shine. ***"I have been very impressed with the students and their ability to cold call businesses and knock on doors with confidence," she said.***

Corina MacDonald, Sundre High School Vice Principal, said, ***"Experiences throughout May Queen are also great for students' resumes, and often it turns into more. When employers see a good worker it can turn into a part time job."***

Saunders said, ***"Thanks to our community for partnering with us on this project! We are grateful for individuals and businesses who provided work opportunities for our students, for parents who volunteered to supervise work projects, and staff who supported students too. Also, thanks to our students for being good ambassadors in the community. We are proud of you, and what we have achieved together."***



Photos previous page, top left. Students working for Duster Transport Ltd. painting bumpers on a picker truck. Left to right: Payton Martyn, Nolan Bijl, Liam McElhinney, Colin Newsham.

Previous page, bottom right (L to R): Lucas Dziadek and Danielle Almonte, help to clean up yard waste at Sundre River Resort.

This page top (L to R): Dziadek, Sam Botheras, Wynter Schaafsma, Almonte clean up yard waste.

This page bottom: Students previously named clean up a sheep pen



# Three Chinook's Edge students and one staff member recognized by Town of Sylvan Lake for contributions



Beacon Hill student Rozalyn Thyer with Sylvan Lake Mayor Megan Hanson. Photo courtesy Town of Sylvan Lake.

Three Chinook's Edge students and an Educational Assistant have received special recognition from the Town of Sylvan Lake through the town's "Youth Spark Awards".

According to the Town of Sylvan Lake, the awards provide "an opportunity for the community to honour youth who are working hard to make a positive impact."

The Awards are given in several categories for students between the ages of eight and 18. Also there is a Spark Champion Award for an adult who has gone above and beyond in championing one or many youth in the community.

## Service & Caring Award goes to Beacon Hill student Rozalyn Thyer

Rozalyn Thyer is a Beacon Hill student, and according to the Town of Sylvan Lake, many teachers and support staff contributed to her "heartfelt and detailed nomination."

In a summary statement the Town said, "***Roz gives up her recesses, lunch hours, and other free time with her friends so that she can go into the Kindergarten classroom to work with the younger students. Roz took the initiative to do this on her own and asked if she could give her time to help others. She does so with a smile, is very responsible, and can always be counted on.***"

In addition, Thyer has learned some sign language so she can communicate with non-verbal students, and often takes time to check in and acknowledge these students, helping her peers also learn how to connect. She approached her teachers and asked if she could include a slide at the school's Pink Shirt Day assembly to discuss people with disabilities and how to support them. On Valentine's Day she created a handmade heart pillow for every student in the Kindergarten class along with a little note of kindness.

***"Roz is very attuned to other people's emotions and she displays compassion and sensitivity to the needs of others,"*** said the Town of Sylvan Lake's summary. ***"Roz unselfishly acts in goodwill to help others as she truly wants to make a positive difference in their lives."***





## Art & Culture Award goes to École HJ Cody High School student Adam Bieganek

Adam Bieganek is an École H.J. Cody High School student who was nominated for the Spark Award by his piano teacher.

According to the Town of Sylvan Lake, Bieganek earned First Class Honours with Distinction (90%+) on his Royal Conservatory of Music Level 10 Piano Exam in January, and he aspires to complete his Associate of the Royal Conservatory of Music (ARCT) Diploma in Piano Performance in June 2025.



***“Achieving this high on this level piano exam is remarkable,” wrote his piano teacher, who noted the average score is 72%. “This is rare thing nowadays which displays his self-discipline, motivation, diligence, persistence, high intelligence, and ambition.”***

The teacher wrote that she admires Bieganek’s achievements in music, but also in academics, teaching piano and in sports. Bieganek volunteers as a soccer referee. She wrote, ***“As one of his mentors, I have personally observed his ability to communicate well with his students to spur them on with their piano progress.”***



## Athletic Ambassador goes to École H.J. Cody High School student Kameron Wallace

Kameron Wallace is an École H.J. Cody High School student who was nominated for the award by three different individuals.

***“Kameron Wallace brings a certain passion and fire to the game of basketball,” wrote the Town of Sylvan Lake in its summary. “If anyone knows Kameron, they know that she is a natural-born leader at all times. She will push you to be the best version of yourself whether you are a player or even a coach.”***

According to the nomination, Wallace helped her team win a zone championship last year, and led her team to provincials twice in her high school basketball career, with the team ranked 4th in the province.

***“Kameron is a key player, not just because of her skills but because of the leadership role she has on and off the court. Many girls look up to her for guidance and it shows,” said the nomination.***



Wallace coaches the U9 co-ed Clippers basketball team, where parents appreciated her ability to connect with their children. She was MVP and captain of her team last year. She continues as captain this year.

*“Her attitude inspires others to be their best,” said the nominator.*

## **H.J. Cody Educational Assistant Kim Nemish is named ‘Spark Champion’**

Educational Assistant, Kim Nemish, from École H.J. Cody High School, was named Spark Champion. According to her nomination, Nemish has supported hundreds of students and *“encouraged them to become the best version”* of themselves.

*“Children feel comfortable talking to Kim because they know they are free of judgment and know she will do whatever she can to help them,”* wrote the nominator, who also said they could think of at least 10 students who would not have made it through high school without Mrs. Nemish by their side.

*“Kim is a veteran EA at HJ Cody, and a staff member who is deeply appreciated,”* said Alex Lambert, Principal, H.J. Cody.

*“She has a strong work ethic. She leads by example and is loved by students, teachers and support staff. I have never met a kid who does not love working with Ms. Nemish. She has a huge heart and always goes to bat for students,”* said Lambert.



All photos on this page and the previous page are courtesy of the Town of Sylvan Lake.

