

Didsbury High School earns gold at national band competition

Didsbury High School band students and the band director were back at school today wearing smiles, knowing they did a great job representing Chinook's Edge, Didsbury High and their community in Toronto, Ontario last week. The concert band, and the school's jazz combo called the Minor Six, both received a gold ranking at MusicFest, a national music festival.

DHS's band was invited after its performance at Acadia University last spring. DHS band director, Kirk Wassmer, said the event in Toronto welcomed 250 bands from across Canada and about 7,000 students. Also, the Minor Six was able to perform at The Rex, a traditional jazz venue.

"I am so proud of the students," said Wassmer. "They played incredibly well, and even in a challenging circumstance. The band was moved to a venue that wasn't acoustically what they were used to. There was a lot of echo, but the kids were professional. They adapted and pulled it together for an amazing performance."



Wassmer said bands are ranked against a standard: either merit, bronze, silver or gold. Wassmer observed there was a balance of bands at each ranking level, ***"so achieving gold is really meaningful."***

"I thought our saxophone section did really well," said Ally Crampton, a Grade 11 student, referring to the symphonic band's performance. Crampton said she was most nervous for the performance of the Minor Six at The Rex. "We just started this band in 2023 casually and for fun, and we are just from a small town. To win gold and to be able to perform at the Rex was a big deal. We practiced a lot - like 14 hours a week for a couple months before the trip. I was jittery leading up to that performance. I've been on lots of stages but I was still nervous and wondered if we would do well. I wondered 'do I know what I'm doing?' Then we got out on stage in that beautiful venue, and it was a breeze. To see that our hard work has paid off, and that we aren't too bad at music, it's pretty cool. I feel accomplished."



Crampton said her family and the families of other band members surprised them by flying out to Toronto to watch their performance at The Rex. ***“It was a fun shock for us all, and made it so special,” she said.***

Students in the Symphonic Winds - the large group of students - also had to face some nerves. ***“We were all very nervous, especially in the warm up room before our performance,” said Drew Delong, a Grade 12 student at Didsbury High School who plays clarinet in concert band, and alto saxophone in jazz band. “We were in a new place and had to figure out the sound. We were all in shock when we won gold. It’s been enlightening that it’s not just our community and parents telling us that we are an amazing band. Outsiders, including distinguished adjudicators, are telling us that. It’s been something we’ve dreamed about and it was amazing to get there.”***

Delong said the trip was ***“fantastic!”*** Highlights for Delong include going to the Blue Jays game, taking in a theater show, and staying in the dorms at the University of Toronto. ***“But winning gold was pretty special,”*** she said.



Also special was the way the students behaved on the trip, said Wassmer. ***“From the moment they met outside the school to the day we came home, the students were outstanding ambassadors for our school and the Didsbury community. I am proud of the way they played and the way they interacted with everyone.”***

Another recognition went to Grade 12 student Mackenzie Dodman for her percussion work with the Symphonic Winds. The award is given to students who demonstrate exceptional leadership within their ensemble.

“This was an amazing trip,” said Wassmer, who will retire from teaching June. “For my final trip with the DHS band, I couldn’t have asked for more. I am just so glad I got to spend time with those kids.”



DHS band director - Kirk Wassmer - receives national band educator award



Neil Yorke-Slader, Associate Director of MusicFest Canada, said, "Kirk has devoted 34 years as a music educator to helping students. In the last 23 at Didsbury High School, he has been recognized at the provincial level by the Alberta Band Association in 2019 with their Elkorn Award. Kirk gave of his time and effort to support his music colleagues as a member for many years on the Alberta Band Association, including tenure as President."

"To see Mr. Wassmer get this award in Toronto, knowing it is his last year with us, was really special," said Ally Crampton, a Grade 11 DHS student. "We are so proud of him. When he started directing us [on the stage in Toronto] he lit right up. Seeing him do his thing was awesome."

Crampton said she was a homeschooled student until Grade 9, and had just started learning how to play alto saxophone when she was placed in Wassmer's band class.

"I started at the bottom of my section, but by the end of Grade 9 I was feeling more confident. That's thanks to Mr. Wassmer. He is so welcoming and makes you feel safe. I love going to band; Mr. Wassmer's class lights up my day. Music will always be a big part of my life, and my experiences in band have made my love for music go even deeper," she said.

The accolades at MusicFest in Toronto trip didn't stop with the band. Didsbury High School band director, Kirk Wassmer, was named this year's recipient of the [I. Keith Mann / NAC Orchestra Outstanding Band Director Award](#).

Keith Mann was a band director at Innisfail High School and then spent part of his music career at what was then Red Deer College. The award has been given in Mann's name since 2002 to exceptional band directors from across Canada.

"To have my name added to the list of outstanding band directors is quite an honour," said Wassmer. "I am well aware of Keith Mann's legacy, so this means a lot."



Cremona School's Gr. 7 /8 band receives invitation to national music festival



Cremona School's Grade 7 and 8 band has received an invitation to attend MusicFest in the spring of 2025, a national competition for bands. The invitation comes after the band's performance at the Alberta Festival of Bands in Red Deer last week.

The Grade 7 and 8 band, with 27 students in it, received "Superior" from the adjudicators, which is the highest ranking available. The school's Grade 9 to 12 band, with 26 students in it, also did very well, receiving an "Excellence" standing from the adjudicators, the second highest category.

"I'm tremendously proud of the students," said Alex Hutcheon, Band Director at Cremona School. "They have such a great attitude. Not only do they love playing music and being together, but whenever we leave our campus we get so many comments about what wonderful kids they are. That's so valuable, in my mind. It's a comment on who they are as people."

"We are very pleased that both bands had excellent performances," said Darryl Korody, Principal of Cremona School. "And I want to acknowledge the important contribution of our band teacher, Alex Hutcheon. He works incredibly hard and makes strong relationships with the students so they want to be in the band, and they want to do well. That's a lot of the reason behind the band's success."

Hutcheon said it's typical that 35 to 40 bands from across Canada are invited to the national event annually. Didsbury High School's band played at MusicFest last week, and as far as Kirk Wassmer, DHS's band director, can remember it's the first time in his 23 years of teaching in Chinook's Edge that a band has gone to nationals, so it's a rare honour and opportunity.

Hutcheon was Wassmer's student at Didsbury High School. So... the very week Wassmer was competing at nationals with the DHS band, Cremona's band - led by Wassmer's former student - qualified to attend the event.

Hutcheon graduated from DHS in 2009 and credits Wassmer for his choice to become a band educator. ***"He is 100 percent, and the sole reason for that decision," said Hutcheon. "The camaraderie I felt being a part of the DHS band, the standard of excellence we played at, and the joy it made me feel... are all strong memories I have. It motivates me to provide that type of experience for my students."***

When Wassmer learned his former student now leads a band that has been invited to nationals, he said, ***"It shows the band is performing to a very high standard. For a band in rural Alberta to receive the invitation is huge. It requires strong musical leadership and I am so proud of Alex for providing that to his students."***

The band director and school leadership will discuss whether the band will attend MusicFest in 2025.



Chinook's Edge dual credit students have the opportunity to meet Alberta Premier Danielle Smith



Two Chinook's Edge students had the opportunity to meet Alberta Premier Danielle Smith last week. Austin Cartwright and Brielle Underhill were attending the "Shaping the Future" [Trades and Technologies Summit](#), hosted in Edmonton by the College of Alberta School Superintendents.

Underhill and Cartwright were among eight student guest presenters on a student panel focused on career learning. Other student guests came from Wolf Creek, Red Deer Catholic Regional Schools, the Calgary Board of Education, and High Prairie School Division.

Underhill is a Grade 12 student at Sundre High School, and is currently taking pre-employment welding in Olds. Underhill was able to present Premier Smith with a rose created by her pre-employment class.

Cartwright is a Grade 10 student at Ecole Olds High School, and is enrolled in the Year 1 Trades Readiness course. Cartwright's mother, Margo Cartwright, also attended as the only parent participant in the panel.

"I was able to share that dual credit has been a real confidence builder for me," said Cartwright. "It's a great program and I think it should be spread out to more schools. Dual credit lights a fire under kids to get their high school work done."

Cartwright said he was nervous to meet Premier Smith, and ***"she was really nice. I am happy she got to listen to what the program is doing for students. I think it helped her understand."***

Underhill said meeting the Premier was "pretty cool". She said before they went on stage, she was able to shake Smith's hand. ***"It was cool to present the rose to her," said Underhill. "I think the Premier wanted to hear what we had to say and that shows she cares."***

Underhill's presentation focused on the impact of dual credit in her life. ***"It has impacted my confidence. I used to be shy. But then I tried dual credit and it set me off on my journey. When I tried welding in Grade 11, I could see I was good at it and that I could make a living at it. All my teachers built my confidence too," she said.***

Underhill liked welding so much that she finished her academic classes at Sundre High School by January 2024, so she could focus on the pre-employment welding program. ***"Knowing I want to pursue welding helped me get to work and get my school work done."***

"We are so pleased that our students had the opportunity to share about their own journey of exploring and experiencing career pathways," said Jason Drent, Chinook's Edge Associate Superintendent.





“Hearing students' personal experiences - and how this career learning is helping them find their own way forward - is very powerful. We anticipate it will have impacted everyone at the conference,” said Drent.

Chinook's Edge Superintendent, Kurt Sacher, said, “Chinook's Edge is working to share the success of this work in the province because it matters for student success. The Chinook's Edge Board has been pleased to see that career readiness is a priority for the provincial government too. Chinook's Edge is hopeful that this added chance to share our success with Premier Smith will be helpful in ensuring the province continues to support this priority.”

Left: Brielle Underhill, a Sundre High School student with Alberta Premier Danielle Smith.
Right: Austin Cartwright, an Ecole Olds High School student.

The Chinook's Edge focus on careers gets national attention from visiting educational leaders

A number of top K-12 leaders from across Canada visited Olds last week, to learn more about the Chinook's Edge approach to career education. The C21 organization was hosting its CEO Academy in Calgary, and took a trip during the afternoon of May 15 to see the Community Learning Campus facilities, learn about career pathways journeys within CESD, and hear from a panel of students.

“Chinook's Edge was happy to welcome visiting educators to Olds, where this journey began. We have had a strong partnership with Olds College of Agriculture & Technology for many years, and that partnership has taught us a lot about how to help students throughout Chinook's Edge successfully transition to careers,” said Jason Drent, Chinook's Edge Associate Superintendent.

“That partnership has now extended to other post secondary institutions and with other K-12 school divisions in Alberta, through the collegiate model, which is exciting. We are grateful for all of our partners,” said Drent.



Right: Superintendent Kurt Sacher meets the bus load of Superintendents after their drive on a school bus from Calgary



Previous page: The group sees the welding facilities at the Community Learning Campus

Middle right: The group sees students in action at the heavy duty mechanics space

Bottom two images: The group observes students in the Vet Tech program

Drent co-presented with Jackie Taylor, who is the Executive Director of the recently formed Central Alberta Collegiate Institute. In their presentation, Drent shared that he and other leaders were thrilled to see - after examining 10+ years worth of Chinook's Edge data - that when students participate in even one dual credit class, they graduate from high school. Drent said several other school divisions examined their data, and they also found the same compelling result.



"We are convinced this high level of success is because of the support we have in place for dual credit learners. Individual staff members work one-on-one with individual students to help them meet expectations of the post-secondary environment," said Taylor.

"Also, our experience has shown us that when students get excited about a career, they do better in their academic learning and this ultimately impacts their high school success as well," said Taylor.

As the Superintendents attending the CEO Academy were touring the Olds facilities, a student in one of the dual credit classes was asked about his experience. He said, ***"Before this [class] I couldn't see a future. Now I do."***



"Thanks to the many educators who have been committed to this work for many years," said Kurt Sacher, Chinook's Edge Superintendent. "You've made a huge difference to the success of students who are finding meaningful career pathways. Also key in our success is the Chinook's Edge Board which has set career connections work as one of the three main strategic directions for the division. The Board's vision in this area, its advocacy work throughout the province with government leaders, and ongoing support has been critically important."



Poplar Ridge School brings generations together through special social event for seniors

Poplar Ridge School students were delighted to welcome more than 100 grandparents and other senior community members to a special social event on Thursday - the first of its kind at the school.

The visitors got to participate in learning activities in students' classrooms, join the students for recess, listen to a local folk music band while having tea and coffee, and also judge an "Iron Chef" competition for the students.

"We wanted to provide an opportunity for students to learn more about their community, and understand that all of these people are taking good care of them. We want students to feel a connection to their roots and to previous generations," said Kim Cocks, Principal of Poplar Ridge School.



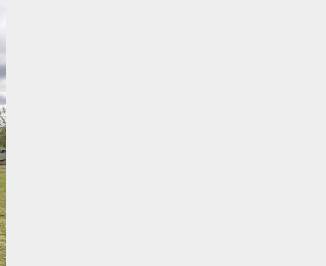
"Also, this gave us an opportunity, as a school, to say thank you to our community. Poplar Ridge School is often the recipient of acts of kindness from community members. Our neighbors go above and beyond in their support for us, and we want them to know just how much we appreciate that," said Cocks.



"It's great to share the students' learning and environment," said Denise Fern, a grandmother of two attending the school. "I think it really shows how community oriented the school is. I like that they are teaching our children about family and giving them a sense of belonging and community."

Ian Hector has 2 grandchildren attending the school. ***"It's been good to get to know the school better and meet the teachers. The students were really excited to show us their school," he said.***





Shelly Pfeiffer’s children used to attend Poplar Ridge School, and she was previously a substitute teacher there as well. She said, ***“It’s great to have students spend time with seniors and learn how to relate to them. It brings back memories for seniors, and it teaches children about respecting seniors. It’s good for everyone.”***

Grade five and six students were especially excited for the day because, while grandparents and students in kindergarten to grade 4 were listening to a band, students in the oldest two grades were competing in an Iron Chef competition. Each team had the same set of ingredients, plus a secret ingredient, and had to create 10 identical individually sized servings of a dessert.



Recess time was extra fun on Thursday, because of all the grandparents joining in!

The desserts were judged by a panel of grandparents on presentation and taste, and then served to the entire group of guests.

“It was exciting to cook for people,” said Lauren Smith, a Grade 5 student.

“I was really looking forward to baking with my friends,” said Maddy Galley, a Grade 6 student. “I think it’s good to have time with grandparents so that everyone gets to know the community.”

“It’s been good that grandparents got to come,” said Silas Oshvalda, a Grade 4 student. “I enjoyed seeing them, playing games with them and talking with them.”





Poplar Ridge Grade 5 and 6 students compete in their own Iron Chef competition

Sundre High's May Queen brings in almost \$30 thousand



The Grade 11 group raised \$10,068.50 to take top honors. The Class of 2025's win resulted in Lucas Dziadek, Natasha Mueller, Claire Rich and Brooke Rosevear being crowned as May Queen Champions for the 2023-2024 school year.

Scott Saunders, Sundre High School Principal said, "Congratulations to all students who worked during May Queen 2024 - amazing results! You have certainly made us proud!"

The tallies are in... Sundre's May Queen event, featured in the [last edition of this newsletter](#), raised a total of \$29,855.

The money will be allocated to a variety of Sundre High leadership projects and activities in the coming year.

