
Northwest Teacher Wins National Award

October 7, 2009



Don Wheler, a teacher from the Northwest School Division, received the Barry Sharpe Award at the Canadian Student Leadership Conference in Olds, Alberta last Tuesday. Given by the Canadian Association of Student Activity Advisors in recognition of exemplary effort and inspiration, this national award has only been presented nine times in the past fourteen years.

“It was a complete and utter surprise,” said Don. “It was very humbling to be in the company of the former recipients of the award... and even more so because the namesake of the award, Barry Sharpe, was there at the opening ceremonies.”

Involved with student leadership from his high school days to the present Wheler was a founding member of the Saskatchewan Association of Student Council Advisors in the early 80’s and has since served in a variety of high-level positions. On the national level Don has served on the executives of both CASAA and of the Canadian Student Leadership Conference since the beginning. He has taken student delegates to 7 national and numerous provincial conferences over the years.

Within his school in Lashburn Don has spearheaded and advised the Student Representative Council for the past 27 years. Within the school division he has played a key role in establishing and running the Northwest Leadership Academy. This academy was set up two years ago to enable students from all of the schools in the division to meet and learn the fundamentals of leadership through a credit course. Students not only learn about styles of leadership, group dynamics, conflict resolution, team building and planning a leadership project, but are also brought into contact with local mentors and introduced to leaders from many walks of life. All students are expected to push themselves beyond the classroom and carry out both an in-school and a community service project.

“The highlight of my years working with students?” mused Don, “Seeing the elected student leaders who had chaired meetings and kept minutes and worked and spent hours on mundane tasks before we hosted the provincial conference take over the leadership role at the conference and run the show. All we had to do was stand in the background and shine the spotlight. That’s what I would define as leadership- shining the light on the new, upcoming leaders and letting them go.