

## **Bronze Medal Win at the Sask. Skills Competition**

**April 30, 2009**

Five students from the Northwest School Division traveled to Regina recently to participate in the 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Saskatchewan Skills Competition. They returned home with some excellent results including a bronze medallion for Neilburg Composite School's D.J. Graham.

The Skills Competition is a forum in which secondary and post-secondary students and apprentices compete in over 30 trades and technology areas. These range from baking and bricklaying to hairdressing and machining. Each discipline sets up practical challenges designed to test the skills required in trade and technology occupations, and the students are then evaluated by judges who are experts in their fields.

Two students from Neilburg, three students from Carpenter High in Meadow Lake, two students from St. Walburg and 8 students from Maidstone High School made the trip down to Regina. They competed in Welding, Cooking, Architectural Technology and Design, Mechanical Computer Assisted Design, Cabinet Making, Carpentry, Prepared Speech, Job Interview, IT Office Applications and Hair Styling.

All of the students returned home very proud of their work and determined to return next year. "The Skills Competition is a tremendous opportunity," said Neilburg Industrial Arts Teacher Mike Jocz. "It's important that students have the opportunity to excel in 'hands-on' disciplines and trades and that schools promote and encourage it."

The competition, while rewarding students for excellence in specific skills and trades-related areas, also directly involves industry in evaluating student performance and keeps the training relevant to employers' needs. It also has the effect, noted Conrad Pura, Executive Director of Skills Canada Saskatchewan, of "promoting skilled trades and technologies as a first-choice career option for youth in Saskatchewan."

In the Commercial Cooking section participants had 3 ½ hours to produce a three-course meal. The meal consisted of an appetizer of Gazpacho soup, a main dish of prune-stuffed pork loin with asparagus spears and rosti potatoes, followed by a dessert of crepes. Competitors were graded on hygiene, waste, time used, taste according to recipe and presentation.

When asked what the secret was that won him the bronze medal over some very stiff competition, young Graham grinned, "I did things that the others didn't," he said. "First of all I used sour cream and added croutons to the soup which the others didn't. And for the dessert while the others used chocolate mousse for their crepes, I poached kiwi fruit and pears for mine. The judges liked the way that the poaching kept the flavour and texture of the fruit."

When asked what made the event special, all of the students expressed how interesting it was to see the facilities that other institutions had, to see the level of preparedness that the competitors brought to the event, and to be able to interact with other young people and industry reps. In the words of DJ, "It was also nice to have something that non-athletes could compete in."