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Generation Next: Incoming scholar prepares for 'giant' steps

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BY PAUL MAYNE





Special to Western News

Dane Sisinni, a 17-year-old Niagara-on-the-Lake resident, is one of Western's two Schulich Leader Scholarship winners.

He may boast marks in the high 90s, volunteer at a pair of local hospitals, coach youth soccer, work as an athletic therapist's assistant at his high school and run his own math tutoring business. But, believe us, Dane Sisinni really does have time to breathe.

The 17-year-old Niagara-on-the-Lake resident hopes to find time to do even more when he arrives at Western to study Engineering this fall. Sisinni is [one of Western's two Schulich Leader Scholarship winners](#). [Scarborough's Kyra Moura will enter Medical Sciences this fall as Western's other Schulich Leader Scholar](#).

Launched in 2012, this \$100 million scholarship fund provides 50 undergraduate scholarships each year, across top Canadian universities. The most promising students can pursue their dreams and become the next global pioneers in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). A similar program is conducted in Israel, where an additional 50 scholarships are awarded annually.

Twenty-five scholarships, valued at \$80,000 each, are designated for students pursuing an engineering degree, and the other 25, valued at \$60,000 each, are designated for students studying science, technology or math.

A robotics enthusiast, Sisinni will focus his first-year energy on software engineering.

But that just may be the start.

“I chose Western because the Engineering program was combined with business and I want to leave my options open heading into my future,” he said. “Western is a place where everything is there. You’re going to be meeting so many people from every discipline. That is very valuable. It provides you with more exposure to so many thoughts and ideas.”

Sisinni recalled the phone call he received with the big news.

“For some reason, the phone was very staticky. I was having trouble understanding them or what was going on. So I asked, ‘Just to confirm, this is what you’re saying – Schulich Leader Scholarship?’” he laughed. “I was ecstatic. It was two days before my graduation; it was pretty exciting.”

While Sisinni admitted this is his biggest honour to date, he is not new to accolades.

While at Ridley College, a private boarding and day university-preparatory school located in St. Catharines, the honours were plenty. From the highest overall average in Grade 9 and 10, to marks like 98 or 99 in science, physics, music, French and others, Sisinni also found time to join the robotics team, debating society and jazz band.

He also tossed a little taekwondo into the mix, where he earned a first-degree black belt.

“When I’m bogged down with a lot of school work, the most important thing is just to stay relaxed. There’s no point in getting stressed out, just stay relaxed and get the job done,” he said. “Most of the activities I’m in are the activities I really love and put a lot of time into.”

For Sisinni’s teachers at Ridley College, this latest achievement didn’t come as a shock.

“This young man is at the top of his class in many ways. Grades and test scores are off the charts,” said Kirk Mitchell, the Ridley College guidance counsellor who nominated Sisinni. “He excels in anything he does in co-curricular – whether it is music, technology, debate or health-related activities. You quickly realize this young man is the real deal.”

He added Sisinni’s most significant growth in the last couple years has been his collaborative and leadership ability, since for most of his life he was marked as a “solo genius.”

“This has certainly changed. I suspect his hundreds of hours of work and internship in the real world are a major factor. But here at school, it has been the Robotics Club that has most inspired him to work/play with his peers. It is the one area in his life where he can both exercise his wonderful intelligence and just be a kid with his friends.

“I have no hesitation that Dane will not only knock the lights out at (Western), but he will also bring others with him. Despite the fact that I tower over his slight frame, Dane is a giant.”

Sisinni said he will be on campus this summer for Western’s Summer Academic Orientation program, which helps first-year students prepared for the start of university through meeting faculty and academic advisors prior to September.

“I am very excited about attending Western in September,” he said.

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