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\$80K scholarship sent Winnipeg student into shock, disbelief, then excitement

Jessica Blatta received prestigious Schulich scholarship on Wednesday

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Jessica Blatta received the \$80,000 Schulich scholarship, which she'll put towards her education at Memorial University in St. John's, N.L. (Submitted)

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A Grade 12 student from Winnipeg is \$80,000 richer this week after receiving a prestigious scholarship for university.

Jessica Blatta is about to graduate from Nelson McIntyre Collegiate. On Wednesday, she found out she won a Schulich Leader Scholarship — but she couldn't quite believe it.

"I came home from school and I was just sitting on my couch, kind of relaxing, and my mom threw this envelope at me, and she hadn't opened it. I just thought it was maybe about entrance scholarships for Memorial [University]," Blatta said.

"And then I opened it, and I saw the first sentence and it said, 'Congratulations, you've won the Schulich scholarship,' and I kind of went into shock, I think."

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Then the news sank in and Blatta's family started to celebrate.

"When I first saw it ... I didn't believe it, almost. Like, I thought something went wrong," she said. "But then, like, when I kind of realized that it was real and this was happening, I kind of was just — felt really relieved. I don't have to worry about finances and I can just focus on my education now."

'High-fived my hand off'

Every year, Schulich scholarships go to 50 Canadian students who are interested in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. The scholarships can be used at the participating university of the recipient's choice.

For Blatta, that's Memorial University in St. John's, N.L. The school was her top pick and stood out to her after she attended a

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summer program on campus.

She found out about the Schulich scholarship through her own research, and mentioned it to her guidance counsellor at the beginning of the year.

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They knew she had a shot because of her interest in science and involvement in the community: Blatta volunteers with Special Olympics and participates in her school's leadership program, sports teams and theatre production.

Her guidance counsellor nominated her for the award, and Blatta said he was thrilled to hear she'd won.

"He was really excited," she said. "He almost high-fived my hand off, actually."

Blatta said the award means a lot to her family, too.

"It's going to help a lot. I have three sisters who all plan to attend university," she said. "It's not just a help for me, but it's also a huge help for my sisters, as well and my parents."

With files from Pat Kaniuga, Marjorie Dowhos, Aidan Geary



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