



NEWS LOCAL

Luke Ingratta, considered among the top 50 students entering science programs at Canadian universities this year, will study at Western University this fall after earning a Schulich Leader Scholarship

By Janis Wallace, Special to Postmedia
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Luke Ingratta. (Photo submitted)

He doesn't consider himself extraordinary, but Strathroy's Luke Ingratta was awarded an \$80,000 scholarship because he was deemed one of the top 50 students entering science programs at Canadian universities this year.

"I was really surprised when I got it," Ingratta said. "It's incredible. I am very honoured to be receiving this scholarship; it's an opportunity very few people get. It's still dawning on me what it truly means.

"This let's me focus more on studies and extracurricular activities than worrying about finances."

The way the Holy Cross Catholic secondary school student learned about the scholarship added to his surprise.

"I was invited to the SDCI (Strathroy District Collegiate Institute) prom and came back (at) about 11 p.m. My parents greeted me with a congratulations balloon and said, "You won this scholarship!" While I was out, someone from Western had called to talk about it."

Ingratta's guidance counsellor, Colette McNally, originally asked if he was interested in applying for the Schulich Leader Scholarship. The hardest part of the process was writing the long essay explaining why he thought he would be a good candidate.

Looking at Ingratta's 96.5 overall average, his list of community volunteer work, membership on the Student Senate, co-ordination of the school's Relay for Life, representation in the Rotary Seminary for Tomorrow's Leaders, acting at both school and in Les Miz for the Grand's High School Project, and playing on school sports teams, it was an easy sell.

"Definitely, without that kind of extracurricular activity it would be hard to stand out from the crowd," he said. "It was a big part of my (application)."

Ingratta plans to enter Western's general first-year science program.

"The scholarship kind of changed my plans," he explained. "I was considering McGill. Western offered the scholarship and I decided it was a better fit. It's closer, easier to keep in touch with my family. It's amazing in terms of positivity. They are so enthusiastic whenever I've gone there. It's a really positive atmosphere."

After his first year, Ingratta plans to specialize in physics, a subject he enjoyed learning about during class taught by science teacher Stan Mrik.

"He was always willing to look over my work," Ingratta said. "It was an enjoyable class. He made demonstrations interesting."

But Ingratta is also keeping an open mind as he heads to university.

"It's going to be an interesting couple of years as I figure out what path I want to go down," he said. "I'll see what Western offers. I don't know what to expect this first year. I'll see what branch of science speaks most. I want to be involved in athletics. I want to taste and sample everything."

The ability to pursue passions is the reason philanthropist Seymour Schulich funded the \$100-million scholarship in 2012. It provides 50 undergraduate scholarships across top universities each year, allowing the most promising students to follow their dreams and become global leaders in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

Two scholarship recipients are selected at each of the 20 participating universities, with five universities receiving an additional two scholarships for attracting the most applications. Students entering engineering programs receive \$100,000 while those planning to study other disciplines within science receive \$80,000. Across the country, more than 1,300 graduating high school students were nominated this year.

For other secondary students interested in applying for the Schulich Leader Scholarship, Ingratta has some advice:

"Don't be intimidated by the essay, or in general," he said. "It's a great honour to be considered to apply. Don't be afraid to put yourself out there. You never know where it will take you."

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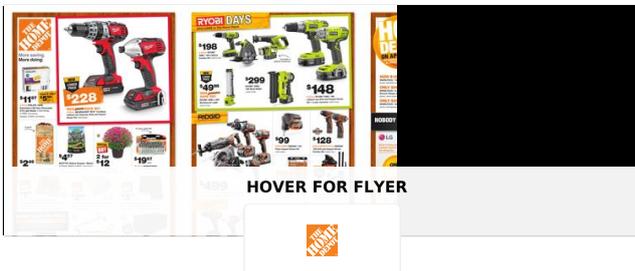
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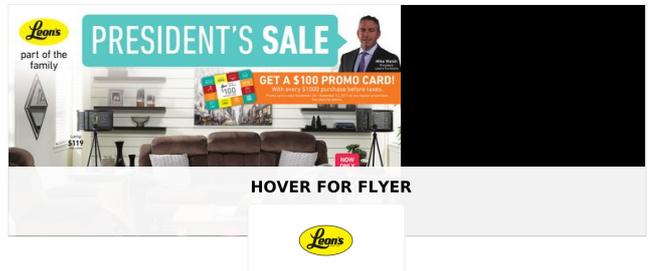
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