

# Prince Philip leaves lasting legacy at community level through Duke of Edinburgh Awards program

**By Brock Weir**

She didn't always jump at opportunities when they presented themselves, but learning how to get out of her comfort zone and do just that has set Julia Garbe on the road to her future.

Ms. Garbe, an engineering student at the University of Waterloo, is currently in a dream internship at Apple, a long way away from when she first tentatively joined the robotics team at King's Country Day School. It's a fulfilling step towards a fulfilling future, but a path she might not be on right now without the Duke of Edinburgh and the international awards program for students he founded which still bears his name.

Prince Philip, the long-serving consort of Queen Elizabeth II, died Friday at Windsor Castle just two months shy of his 100th birthday. Following his death, flags across the community and the country as a whole were lowered in his honour as leaders paid tribute to his life of service.

‘A man of great service to others’ first as a decorated naval officer and later as a dedicated leader in the areas of community engagement and philanthropy ‘the Duke always sought out the best in people and challenged them to strive for greater heights,’ said Prime Minister Justin Trudeau last week.

The Duke's self-prescribed mandate of bringing out the best in people and challenging them to strive to greater heights is evidenced by the numerous local students who have come up through the Duke of Edinburgh's Awards.

The Awards, which challenge students to set their own goals in four key areas to ‘take control of their lives and their futures’ was first founded in 1956 and established in Canada in 1964.

Since its inception, the Award has reached more than 1 million students spread over more than 130 countries, to carry out volunteer work, develop new skills, set personal fitness goals, and undertake an ‘adventurous journey.’

‘It is crafted in such a way that the individual students can create their own award experience,’ says Major Brian McCue, Commanding Officer of the 142 SAC Highland Cadet Corps of St. Andrew's College (SAC). ‘It provides a guideline or a framework for life experience and it is very broad but also gives a foundation that young people really value. It really gets them on track, which is awesome.’

‘The program encourages young people to explore the challenge themselves and to motivate themselves and develop self-confidence along the way and belief in themselves, striving to reach goals they never thought they could achieve.’

Major McCue became involved in the Duke of Edinburgh's Awards long before joining SAC as an educator through the Army Cadet program working with inner-city youth in Downtown Toronto. Through this work, he began volunteering with the Awards' Canadian office.

As news of Prince Philip's death was announced last week, memories of meeting the Awards' founder were flooding back.

‘He was very casual, loved speaking with young people and award leaders as well,’ he remembers. ‘I had an opportunity on three or four occasions to attend the Gold Level award presentation with Prince Philip. He was very engaged with young people.’

In 2010, Major McCue attended one such Gold Award presentation at Toronto's Royal York Hotel which was not only presided over by the Duke but attended by the Queen as well. It was a hot July day and as soon as Prince Philip stepped up to address that

afternoon's group of recipients, the power went out leaving the ballroom in all but complete darkness.

'He didn't flinch,' he recalls. 'He just stepped forward and spoke to the young people and said, 'Luckily I have a very loud voice,' and carried on. That was his philosophy: don't just talk about it; get out and do it.'

McCue is a loud voice for the Duke of Edinburgh's Awards within the SAC community. More than 60 years on since its founding, he says it still resonates with students because it allows them to 'craft their own journey.'

'You might decide for your [volunteer service] to go to the OSPCA and help walk the dogs. The fellow next to you might be helping at the local hospital. Someone else might be doing it in a soup kitchen. Everyone's award is crafted to their own goals and what they would like to see, the same with their adventurous journey.'

'One of the young people I took out was on the Bruce Trail. We stopped for a lunch break and I thought, 'Is everything okay?' He was standing by a fence and wasn't really taking part in the lunch. I wandered over to him and he said, 'Is that a cow?' He was looking at a field and this 14-year-old had never seen a cow in real life, only pictures. Sure enough, the cow wandered over and he was mystified.'

Julia's journey with the Duke of Edinburgh's Awards took her to an active volunteer role at the Aurora Cultural Centre, building her skills by taking up the clarinet for the very first time, lending a hand to building a school in Ecuador, and setting out in a canoe in Algonquin Park.

'The most important thing I learned is just the habit of volunteering and always jumping at the opportunity,' she shares. 'If you're given the opportunity, always say yes and you have a shot at something. You can always learn from any of the activities that you do. Learning about myself came out of developing that habit and I don't think I would have been someone who so actively volunteers and jumps at opportunities if given the chance before I started this award.'

'One of the first big steps in my life that set me on this path was joining the robotics club at my school. That is something I was always interested in but never took the chance because there weren't any girls on the team, I didn't have any friends on the team, it was all people I didn't know. When I got into the habit of volunteering through the Duke of Ed, I thought, what could possibly go wrong? Joining the robotics team completely changed my life. I fell in love with robotics, decided to go into mechatronics and engineering at the University of Waterloo and through a series of different work experiences, I have now landed myself an internship at Apple for eight months.'

'I would encourage anyone to give the Duke of Edinburgh's Awards a try. It is a marathon, not a sprint. It is not a quick thing you can get, but it will open a lot of doors and build habits that will honestly change your life for the better - and also the people around you.'

For more on the Duke of Edinburgh's Awards in Canada, visit [dukeofed.org](http://dukeofed.org).