



HANDS-ON LEARNING In the school's Technical Education Department culinary teacher Chris Cavalier shows Meghan Bate, left, and Rebecca Hulsman how to glaze cinnamon rolls.

Bateman is city's 'best kept secret'

By Tim Whitnell

News

Aug 12, 2007

The start of the new school year is just around the corner, and the Burlington Post wants to share with its readers the unique learning environment that is offered behind the walls of Robert Bateman High School.

"All of us do not have equal talent, but all of us should have an equal opportunity to develop our talents" - John F. Kennedy

The quote by the late U.S. president can be found on Robert Bateman High School's website and is akin to a daily motto at the New Street school.

Mixing an individual's talents with an opportunity to explore their interests is a mantra of Bateman's principal and the type of student she believes can be produced at her school -- a young person with talents in one or more traditional or non-traditional academic areas with the ability to pursue either a post-secondary education or career path.

Principal Mary-Jo Dick-Westerby loves to talk about Bateman and its variety of programming for students of various academic abilities and vocational skills, just don't refer to Robert Bateman H.S. (in her presence) as Lord Elgin, General Brock, Robert Elgin, Lord Bateman or any other variation.

"I was the principal of both Brock and Elgin.... We're Bateman now," she told the Post during a tour of the school.

The school is named for Robert Bateman, the world-renowned wildlife artist who once lived here and taught art and geography at nearby Nelson H.S.

Four years after the academic-based Lord Elgin was merged with the vocational-based General Brock - the latter having been located a little to the west down New Street -- Dick-Westerby says the new high school has arrived as a unique educational entity with its own multi-faceted identity.

It is a school that offers something for every student regardless of their academic abilities and interests.

"(Many) people don't know what we do here. It's the best-kept secret. The individualization. The kids can excel (in school) at what they're good at (but) you're (also) expected to participate in the community," said Dick-Westerby.

The new-age composite high school attempts to accommodate all students, she said.

"We're trying to open up opportunities. The reality is most (students) aim for university but most won't get there -- it's not what they want or need. A lot happens in the teenage years in terms of making decisions and connections. School prepares them to do some things and we like to think that we prepare them to do a variety of things," said Dick-Westerby.

Bateman has a modest student population of 1,450 but, because of the variety of programs offered, some of which are regional and attract students from across Halton, during the 2006-07 school year a whopping 32 buses were needed to transport pupils to the school every day.

Programs are offered in all seven pathways of the Ontario high school curriculum. The breakdown of students by learning stream during the last school year was as follows:

- 50 per cent in the university/college stream, the traditional academic contingent;
- 24 per cent at the Essential level, the level below applied and academic;
- 17 per cent in the International Baccalaureate (IB) pre-university regional program -- it was the first IB centre within the Halton public board, starting in 2001; a new IB program starts in Oakville this fall;
- 4 per cent in Life Skills, modified programming for students who will not get a H.S. diploma but a certificate, they will go on to do supported employment;
- 2 per cent in The Centre, a regional program for individuals with a range of physical and mental challenges;
- 3 per cent in the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP), pre-apprenticeship courses only

"It's a complex school, student focused," said Dick-Westerby. "If it's good for kids, we'll do it. The complexity isn't for everybody, but it should be. Not everybody is going to get 96 per cent on a chemistry exam or throw a TD pass in a football game.

"They (students) can do other things well. One student organized a skateboard competition. It appealed to a population that does not get a lot of recognition," she noted.

Murray Zehr, Bateman's head of technological education, co-operative education and art, said variety appears to be the spice of life for students at Bateman.

"Students have described their school as a mall because where else can you dine in a restaurant, get your hair done, conjugate a French verb, change the oil in your car, make a corsage for your mom, differentiate an equation, write an essay --and get it edited by an IB (International Baccalaureate) student?" said Zehr.

He said the school has more to offer than most high schools in some areas by virtue of its size and diversity of its staffing complement.

"The reason I feel the tech and co-op programs run so successfully here is the average school will have one or two teachers and a class or two; we have six co-op teachers," said Zehr.

"I have (co-op) students who are working on construction sites, in hospitals and in lawyers' offices. It is so important in today's society that they have the full picture of what the job entails."

Zehr said Bateman offers courses that are not available at any other schools in Halton, such as the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP), chef training, OYAP auto body collision repair and the medical health technician program, which offers personal support worker certification upon completion of the course.

"The technology programs offered at Bateman are not only current with today's industries, but they also assist students' learning by offering experiential learning as close to industry as possible," he said.

"We offer computer science and computer engineering, communication technology, health care, cosmetology, landscape design, construction technology, hospitality and tourism, chef training, pastry chef, manufacturing, floristry, technological design, auto mechanics and auto collision repair," noted Zehr.

OYAP students often go on to do a co-op placement at a business or organization in the community to get specific training and hands-on experience.

"Our preference is to accept them (into OYAP) in their final year of school (Grade 12). We want them to have their core (courses) out of the way ... We prefer to have them go to OYAP and then to co-op, which (often) leads to an apprenticeship," said Zehr.

The chef-training program accepts 24 students from Halton while the auto body repair class takes 20.

Student Alex Heaman-Maracle is one of the OYAP success stories at Bateman. He won a gold medal in the auto body collision repair category at the annual Canadian Skills Competition in Nova Scotia in May 2006, which qualified him for the world championships in Japan this fall.

"One of our chef training (grads) is pursuing a career as a dietitian in a hospital," Zehr noted.

One of Bateman's June graduates, R.J. Mousinho, may typify the kind of student that John F. Kennedy was referring to in his observation about enhancing a person's talents through opportunity.

Mousinho has a passion for food, specifically baking, but she also excels at dancing. The teen had to make a decision whether she favoured pursuing post-secondary interests primarily involving her hands or feet and chose the latter, being accepted into George Brown College's dance program.



"I want to open my own dance studio," said Mousinho.

While being interviewed at Bateman, though, she is talking about her school experiences involving food preparation.

"I do mostly cakes and pastries --- they are the most fun. You can put your own (style) into it."

WINNING STYLE

In addition to producing some tasty treats, Bateman's food school has garnered the school acclaim as several of its students performed well at various competitions last spring.

Lauren Samborski and fellow baking team members Mousinho, Victoria Brosseau and Jackie Sullivan won a gold medal in Toronto at George Brown College's The Chefs in the City Competition held in the spring.

Two days following that competition, Samborski teamed with Kristen Allin to capture the culinary gold medal at the Third Annual Niagara Invitational High School Cook Off.

Mousinho likes the variety of instruction she gets with dance and the food school.

"It keeps me diverse. It keeps me going back and forth. You have to be dedicated to do both successfully. If dance doesn't work out, I'd become a pastry chef."

For Mousinho, it's Bateman's fusion of elements that appeals to her and makes it work, she said.

"It gets back to the philosophy that arts is tech and tech is art. It's become better (here); (Elgin) was more academic and Brock was more technical. (Now) we're not trying to be two different schools; we're like an emulsion, we make it work together and connect."

Bateman graduate Greg Luckey also pursued the culinary field at Bateman with an eye to making food his career. He took the OYAP chef training program in '05-06, excelled in it, and has been a line cook at the downtown Paradiso restaurant for 16 months.

Luckey said he learned a lot at Bateman and continues his culinary education at Paradiso.

"I like to explore everything. It isn't a place where I do a certain thing, I have a part in everything. I want to become a chef and own my own restaurant," said the 19 year old.

He remembers working in and making meals for Bateman's small restaurant, Le Bistro, which is open to the public for lunch by reservation. It also sells hot meals and bakery items for takeout by the public.

One resident has been a regular visitor to Bateman's Le Bistro over the past few years.

"I have a group that comes from our condo on a Friday," said Jenny Davies, who on this particular day was there with a group of older women. She said they often order a roast of beef or pork produced by the students and call a couple days in advance with their large sit-down order.

"Everything we've had is excellent," Davies said of the food. "The service is really good and the young people are very good, very polite."

Chris Cavalier is a chef and the head of Bateman's food school. The hospitality and baking teacher started at Brock H.S. in 1990 before moving to the newly-opened Bateman.

"I oversee what goes out in the cafeteria and the restaurant," said Cavalier, who is assisted fulltime by chefs Doug Cooper and Neil Dinzey.

Cavalier's wife, Brenda, is an educational assistant (EA) at the school and does a lot of the food school's product ordering.

Chris Cavalier said the Brock/Bateman food schools have graduated a number of students who are currently working as sous (under) chefs and cooks at various restaurants in Burlington and beyond.

He said the chef-training program is so popular that the 24 student positions for 2007-08 were already filled last spring and that there is a waiting list.

"We try to cover the same curriculum as the college courses."

Cavalier said the regional health department, St. John Ambulance officials and guest chefs from city restaurants are asked to come in to talk to students about issues like safe food preparation, first aid, and food industry trends and expectations.

While Dick-Westerby and Zehr are excited about the possibilities to expand student learning and environmental stewardship, and see a bright future for Bateman in those regards, there are some clouds on the horizon.

ENROLMENT ON THE DECLINE

The Halton District School Board has concerns about Bateman's future student enrolment ratio and, hence, the viability of some of its programming.

The school board produced a report in June that states that by 2011 enrolment projections indicate a significant decrease in the number of college/university stream students with the ratio of academic to vocational pupils being about 50 per cent each. Research indicates the vocational ratio should not exceed 30, when considering student leadership, behaviour, culture and resources.

Despite its established educational niche, Zehr has a lot more planned for Bateman in terms of expanding the types of courses offered and updating the look and 'green' infrastructure of the school.

"The focus will be on environment, which could include a 'green' roof, a roof-top garden growing our own organic vegetables and herbs, an energy-conservation course focusing on solar power, wind power and items like geothermal energy, possibly a windmill down the road or solar panels on the roof, possibly composting at the school, more in-depth recycling, and possibly a course on organic and healthy eating."

He would like the school to get into the latter subject in detail.

"Rather than a unit or two in a course, I would allow a whole semester on healthy eating and the power of food. I am in the process of forming an advisory committee to assist me in these endeavors," said Zehr.

There are other initiatives and programs at Bateman that are likely unique to Halton such as the Shakespeare Festival where drama students dress up in Elizabethan period costume and perform scenes from The Bard's plays. The school's foyer is decorated to resemble London's historic Globe Theatre.

"The real icing on the cake -- we prepare wedding cakes as well -- are the extras that we do at Bateman that separate us from any other school in Ontario," said Zehr.

"The school hosts an annual holiday dinner where more than 1,000 students and staff sit together family-style and enjoy a turkey dinner compliments of its food school students and staff.

"There is also the annual dinner theatre, which showcases the school's hospitality and arts students. In May it presented the musical play the Pirates of Penzance complete with a three-course meal," he said.

Other initiatives at Bateman include occasional Town Hall-style meetings where students discuss teen issues and focus on school-based concerns or projects.

The school also stages what it calls 'empowerment' meetings in May. Male and female students attend separate forums where they can discuss gender-specific issues and attend workshops on things like pilates, diet and sports psychology.

Bateman has a Student Government Organization through which students create, organize and run events throughout the school year. Events include the Grade 9 Olympics, school dances where more than 400 students attend, and spirit weeks.

SCHOOL-BASED CLUBS

There is also a lunchtime leadership group that organizes staff/student games, fundraising initiatives and lunch-time activities.

Bateman has a large athletic program boasting more than 35 teams involving 500 athletes. The sports run the gamut of the traditional and even includes cricket. Ninety-five per cent of Bateman's coaches are staff members.

Then there are the school-based clubs.

"Not everyone can be a sports star so we have a sewing club, a curling team, a stained glass club and a knitting club," said Dick-Westerby.

Bateman's School Reach academic competition team finished first in Halton in 2007.

One of its IB students finished first in the national biology contest, and another student received a top 10 Award in a Canada-wide chemistry competition.

In the International Baccalaureate program, the first graduating class had 11 students while the 2006-07 graduating class had 22 students.

The goal of the IB curriculum is to deepen the scope of the student's learning, offering enrichment beyond the Ontario curriculum to prepare them for a smooth transition to university.

Bateman 2007 graduate Megan Bagley obtained a perfect score in gaining her IB diploma, a mark very few people attain worldwide. She is attending the University of Wyoming this fall on a full scholarship to study astrophysics.

STANLEY CUP KEY RING ORDERED

She received so much advance course credit from having done so well in her IB courses that she will be able to study English literature and music as well.

Then there's the school's machine shop, which has gained some recognition for its production of a unique item.

Jennifer Bishop, an EA at Bateman and a longtime friend of Phil Pritchard, local resident and curator and vice-president of the Hockey Hall of Fame in Toronto, presented him with a metallic Stanley Cup key ring to show him what Bateman's manufacturing class had been making.

Soon afterward the HHoF requested 12 additional key Cup rings. The first order was distributed among the staff at the hall. A second order of 50 key rings was placed on behalf of The Hockey Hall Of Fame, to be distributed around the world at destinations the Stanley Cup visits.

"We only charge a couple bucks per. The more people order, the cheaper they become. We make maybe 50 cents off of each and that money goes directly back into the manufacturing program.

"We don't make much money off of these, but people enjoy them and the kids take pride in them. Plus, it is great PR for our school and our programming," said Zehr.

FAST FACTS ABOUT ROBERT BATEMAN H.S.:

- All students and staff belong to one of four houses: purple, gold, white or black. Everyone earns house points through achievement, effort, citizenship and other activities that bring honour to Bateman. Houses and individuals are recognized at the Bateman Best awards in June. The winning school's students have their full names placed on a large display board in perpetuity in the cafeteria.

- The Bateman Wish project has raised thousands of dollars for various charitable organizations and provided Christmas dinner and Christmas packages for dozens of Burlington families.
- The Holiday Baking, Decoration and Craft Sale and Bateman Bash talent show are continuing traditions that are more than 30 years old dating to the school's General Brock/Lord Elgin influences.
- The Corner Store school store, offering student-created crafts, flowers, school memorabilia and supplies, is managed by business class students and operated by co-op students from the Life Skills program.
- The front hall mural was created by students and staff and includes a contribution from artist/environmentalist Robert Bateman.