

Former OP student honoured for excellence in teaching

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Published on Dec 15, 2010

Mike Murray had no intention of becoming a teacher.

Yet every day, the 29-year-old is making a difference in the lives of students at his former secondary school, Orchard Park.

“Students absolutely think he is the best. No matter how bad a problem can be, Mike always sees the glass half full,” said principal Marco Barzetti. “His positive energy rubs off on anyone who comes in contact with him.

Orchard Park and the Hamilton- Wentworth District School Board are lucky to have Mike as a teacher.” Murray graduated from Orchard Park in June 2000.

He then went to the University of Western Ontario to obtain a business degree and worked in the private industry for three years.

Murray, who was a counsellor at Camp Maple Leaf for 10 summers between beginning secondary school and finishing university, realized his heart wasn't in business.

“The business jobs were fun, but they weren't what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. I thought, ‘What should I do next?’” he said. “Looking back on my time as a counsellor at Camp Maple Leaf, I realized how rewarding it was and that I wanted to work with kids. I decided to make a 180-degree turn and start fresh.” Murray went to Niagara University in the United States to obtain a master of education and did a student block at Orchard Park in the spring of 2007.

After graduating from the university, he was hired as a parttime teacher at Orchard Park in September 2007.

In February of 2008, Murray was hired as a full-time teacher at the school, where he has taught business, co-op, geography and math.

He is currently assistant head of the math department, a student council teacher advisor and coach with the water polo team.

Murray said he loves teaching and can't imagine doing anything else.

“Working with kids and seeing them grow is probably my favourite part. Being a good teacher means not only teaching students the curriculum, but also teaching them about life in general,” he said. “It also means helping students through any struggles they may have.

The outside-of-the-curriculum connections are the ones that make you go home at night and go, ‘I'm doing a good job’ – making a difference, even in a small way, means everything.” It's that mentality that made all the difference in Murray recently earning a Hamilton Excellence in Teaching Award from the Industry-Education Council of Hamilton. The award honours exemplary, inspirational teachers in the community who have a true understanding of mentorship.

“It was a little bit surprising to me. I never would have imagined being recognized like that,” he said. “It's a



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good feeling to know that someone else thinks that you're doing a good job. I'm truly honoured and humbled." There is no one more deserving of the award, said Barzetti.

"Mike's dedication to his department, classes, school and the Stoney Creek community is incredible. Having once been a student here, he is now generously giving back," he said.

"What more can you ask. He is a true Orchard Park Patriot." Murray said it's funny how life can bring you full circle.

"I had no intention of being a teacher. When I was on my way to Western for business, I thought, 'I'm going off to see the world and do bigger and better things,'" he said. "I came to realize the best things are right here.

There's nothing else I'd rather be doing or anywhere else I'd rather be."

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