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## **NIC Port Alberni Student Wins Gold at Canadian Skills Competition**

Cormac Eby, a student of North Island College's Joinery & Cabinetmaking Foundation program, has won the gold medal in Post Secondary Cabinetmaking at the Canadian Skills Competition in Charlottetown, PEI. Each contestant was given only 14 hours to build a project that included hand-cut dove tails, mortise and tenon joints, and through wedged tenons. The projects were then graded by judges from across Canada. Competing against 9 provincial gold medal winners from each province, Eby artfully constructed a beautiful seat, with compartment and armrests, in black walnut and ash.

Eby, who came to Port Alberni from Vernon to take NIC's Joinery & Cabinetmaking Foundation program, watched his father build wooden items in their woodworking shop at home. "Originally I was interested in West Coast native carving, and I got a set of chisels when I was 12 years old," he says. "I carved through high school and took wood working classes, so wood working was the obvious choice upon graduation. Eventually, I want to do fine furniture design."

The Canadian Skills Competition showcases students' technical and leadership skills, and is the only national, Olympic-style, multi-trade and technology competition for young students and apprentices in the country. The event provides competitors with valuable hands-on work experience while raising public awareness of the importance of skilled trades and technology careers. This year, 500 competitors in approximately 40 trades participated. The various competitions included welding, carpentry, automotive, electrical, aircraft maintenance, and robotics, as well as hair dressing, esthetics, cooking and baking.

"It was an excellent experience," says Eby. "I was excited to win the provincials and the idea of going to PEI was appealing. The event was much bigger than I expected, and people there took trades really seriously!"

Starting on the first day, Eby began working on the first half of his project, knowing that he would be judged at the end of the day on the first portion of the event. "I was having a hard time focusing, and I was going slow. I made a mistake close to the beginning, but managed to pick up and finish as much as I could in the afternoon. At the end of that day, I lost marks for not having completed the first half."

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The next day, when Eby began the second half of the project, he felt that the gold was out of his grasp, and consequently, was not as nervous. "I felt I was going for second or third, so I wasn't as tense," he says. "I worked hard, did my best, and enjoyed the competition."

So, when the medals were announced, and his name was called for first place, Eby was amazed. "I was absolutely shocked," he admits with a laugh, "I don't think I'd ever been so shocked in all my life. Having lost those marks on the first day, I thought I'd fallen behind, and I never dreamt I'd actually win." The gold medal in Cabinetmaking was awarded by Mike Holmes, host of the television program 'Holmes on Homes', who is an avid supporter of trades training in Canada.

"I've really enjoyed the Joinery & Cabinetmaking program," says Eby, "The NIC shop is excellent, with machines that you can't get easy access to elsewhere. Plus, it's given me time to design projects and furniture, and think about ways to do a project differently or better. It's given me time to explore."

The Joinery & Cabinetmaking Foundation program at North Island College is a 9-month certificate program in which students learn to design, construct, finish and repair high-quality wood products. During the program, students complete the training requirements for the first year of the four year Joiner Apprenticeship to the Interprovincial (Red Seal) standard. They also study computer-aided drafting and build projects of their own design. Graduates are awarded a certificate in Furniture Design and Construction as well as a certificate in Joinery & Cabinetmaking.

"NIC students have been gold winners at Skills B.C. for the last four years and have gone on to Skills Canada each time," says Russ Ramsden, Joinery & Cabinetmaking instructor, "The competition is intense: our program is a Foundation or entry level, and we can be competing with third or fourth year apprentices."

Tom Weegar, principal of NIC's Port Alberni campus, feels that Cormac Eby has done a wonderful job of representing his province in this prestigious competition. "We're proud of what he's accomplished," says Weegar, " And on behalf of all of us at NIC, I'd like to extend congratulations to Cormac on his success."

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