

CAREERS: The Next Generation honours Alberta teachers with inaugural award

Two Alberta teachers have received a new award from CAREERS: The Next Generation for their efforts in helping students make the transition from the classroom to the world of work.

Lori Irvine, Off-Campus Coordinator at Lindsay Thurber Comprehensive High School in Red Deer, and William Smolak, Off-Campus Education Coordinator at Vegreville Composite High School in Vegreville, are the first recipients of the Hilton Mierau Award of Excellence in Off-Campus Learning.

“This award was created by a donor to honour the educators who go above and beyond their duties to provide students with the opportunity to connect work to learning,” says Andy Neigel, President and CEO of CAREERS: The Next Generation. “We are pleased to recognize these unsung heroes as the true champions and innovators in off-campus learning.”

A teacher at Lindsay Thurber for 18 years, Mrs. Irvine has been Off-Campus Coordinator for the past four years. Largely through her efforts, more than 20 per cent of the school’s population is involved in the Work Experience Program, the Registered Apprenticeship Program, and other off-campus programs. An example of Mrs. Irvine’s innovative approach to off-campus education is her use of video conferencing to connect students with specialists in various occupations before finding placements. She also uses an extensive network of Lindsay Thurber alumni to mentor students and connect them to placements.

Mr. Smolak returned from retirement five years ago to provide a new focus for the off-campus education program at Vegreville Composite. He developed such a positive profile for the program that it now sees more than 90 students out of 390 complete at least one course in Off-Campus Education. Mr. Smolak has partnered Vegreville Composite with more than 40 businesses in the community that regularly accept students for Work Experience, Green Certificate and Registered Apprenticeship placements. At the end of each school year he recognizes participating businesses with an employer appreciation evening and generally recruits 10 to 15 new worksites to the off-campus program each year.

“The education community is the first level that the CAREERS field team work with in student awareness and building opportunities for students to experience off-campus learning,” says Eric Newell, Chairman of the Board of CAREERS. “Without these strong advocates for youth career development, the success of CAREERS and the opportunity for Alberta’s youth to explore a range of careers would not be possible,”

The new award is named for Hilton Mierau, who was a strong advocate of off-campus education as a teacher at William Aberhart High School in Calgary before he was seconded as a field director with CAREERS in 1999. As a member of the CAREERS team, Hilton worked tirelessly to take the advantages of the RAP program and other CAREERS school-to-work transition programs to an ever growing number of Alberta's youth.

CAREERS: The Next Generation is an industry-driven private/public partnership dedicated to the career development of Alberta's youth. CAREERS brings together industry, educators, government, communities, and students to meet the inter-dependent needs of youth employability and skilled labour shortages.

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