

Through Shad Valley program

Local student helps develop unique exhaust system

Alex Burns has an interesting story to tell about what he did on his summer vacation—he helped develop a plan for a car's exhaust system that may lead to a patent.

Burns, 17, a Georgetown High School student, participated in Shad Valley, a Canadian program that combines 472 motivated teens with university professors and corporate leaders at nine university campuses in Canada and the United Kingdom. The program began in 1981 and has over 7,000 alumni, 13 of whom are Rhodes scholars.

Burns said the overall concept of Shad Valley is to have 50 to 60 youths investigate scientific, technological and entrepreneurial ideas. But the more important underlying message is "to meet interesting, unique, intelligent teenagers motivated to do what they want to do, and not be there to just lay back and have fun."

Burns was assigned to the University of New Brunswick (UNB) campus and for the month of July, Burns attended lectures, workshops, field trips, seminars, and labs taught by university faculty and industry experts. His day began at 8:30 a.m. and ended at 10:30 p.m. on a variety of topics that ranged from yoga, the uses of fungi to fourth dimensional geometry.

Burns said, while a high academic standard was considered during the acceptance process for the program, organizers were looking for more from the teens.

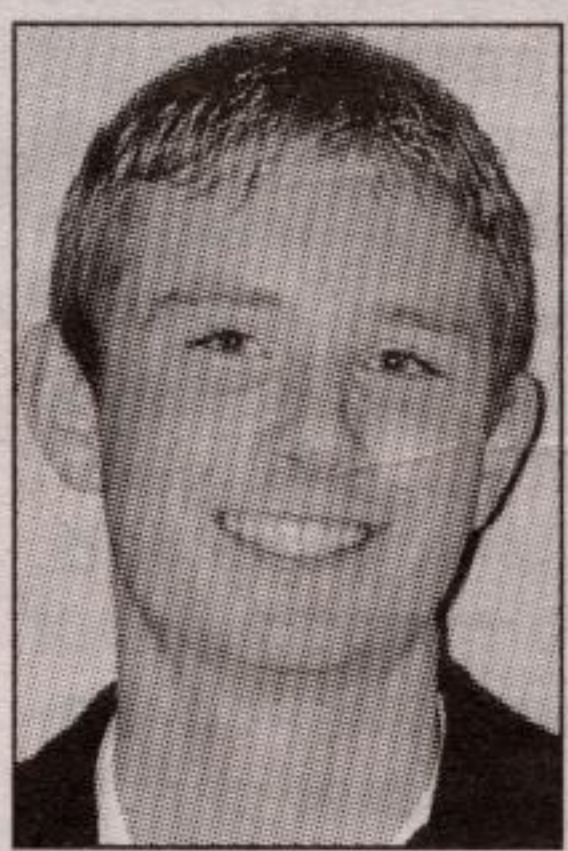
Burns' specialty, for example, is computers and how to develop Web sites

while another student's was playing the fiddle. It was not so much the talent that mattered, but the desire to meet other similarly motivated teens who wanted to create innovative ideas, he said.

The theme this year was how to make a better environment, and at UNB, Burns' Red House team of 15 first came up with the idea of the cleaner catalytic converter. The Exantlo System is a modified exhaust system that eliminates 60 per cent of car pollution. During the first 60 seconds of starting a car, he said, a car's catalytic converter cannot minimize harmful exhaust gases because the temperature is too low. The Exantlo System diverts and compresses that exhaust into storage, processing it through the converter at the end of the trip.

A preliminary patent has been put on the idea and the team has about year to come up with money to go through the patenting process. Burns said qualified engineers have looked at the idea, and "so far no one has found a flaw."

When the July session ended, other houses joined Red House to help develop the idea during August to prepare for the judges' review in September. The teens had to develop the full package: a prototype, business plan, Web site and promotional video. Burns was on the committee to develop the Web site and the results can be seen on www.katharosmech.com. Katharos is Greek for clean.



ALEX BURNS

The teens, living across the country, kept in touch through the Internet and instant messaging services.

The final touches were placed on the plan in August while Burns worked an internship at Polycon in Guelph which had served as his Shad Valley corporate sponsor. There, he helped with quality control and statistical analysis.

Tomorrow (Thursday), the results of the judging will be announced at the Royal Bank of Canada/Shad Entrepreneurial Cup Awards at the Ontario Science Centre.

Other ideas developed by other Shad

Valley university campuses included: Watersalve, an oil-eating bacteria, MONT-TEG, an electrical recovery system that converts thermal energy from hot pipes to electrical energy and MoistSense, a sprinkler that measures the moisture level of the soil and determines whether a garden needs watering.

Burns calls his Shad Valley summer a "fantastic experience" and he encourages other teens to experience it. He said the friends he made are lifetime ones.

"I know that if in 10 years I fly to B.C. I'll be knocking on the door of the friend I made during Shad Valley," he said.

For more information on the Shad Valley program go to www.shad.ca

—By Cynthia Gamble, staff writer

Food for thought

For his ninth birthday, Eric Smith of Georgetown asked his guests to bring food for the Georgetown Bread Basket instead of presents. This year his friends donated 105 lbs. of food to the food bank and last year's party netted the food bank 80 lbs. of food. Smith is hoping to raise even more food next year.

Submitted photo



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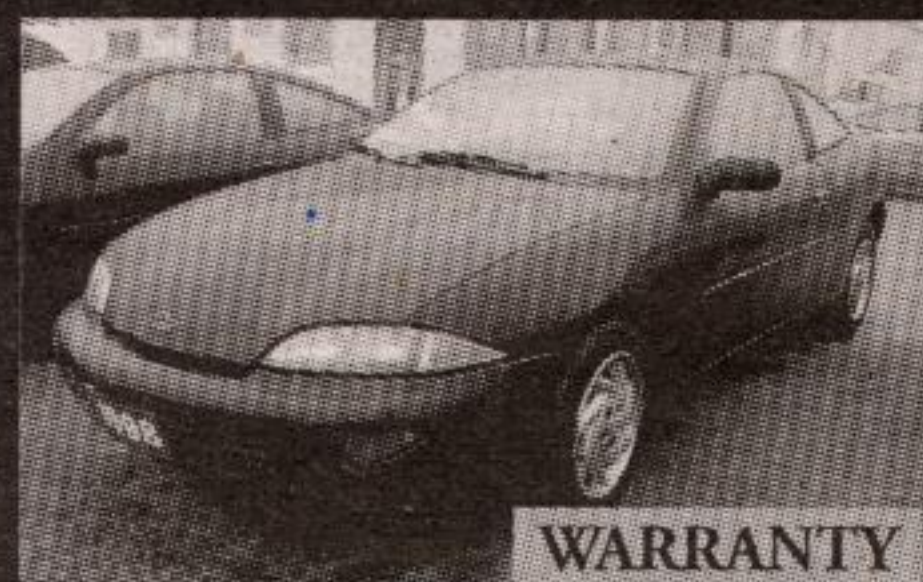
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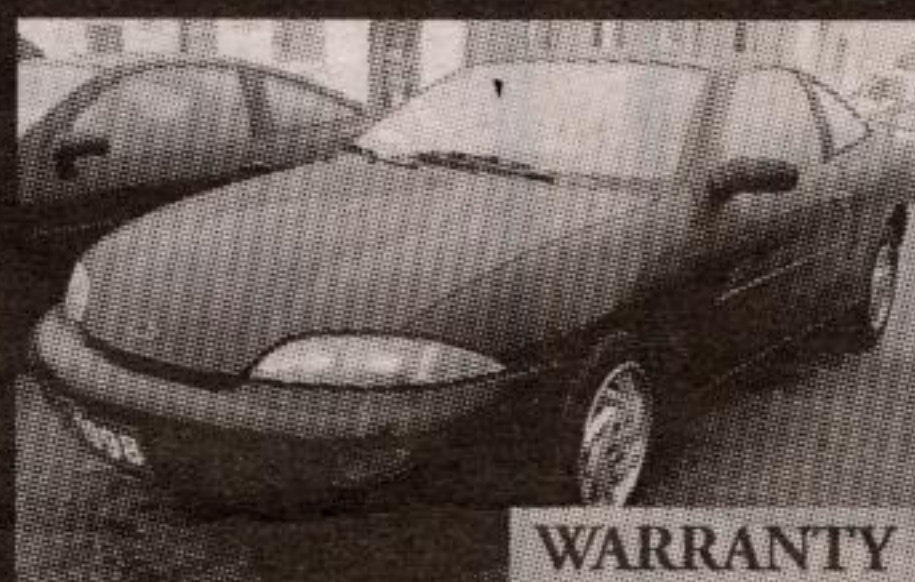
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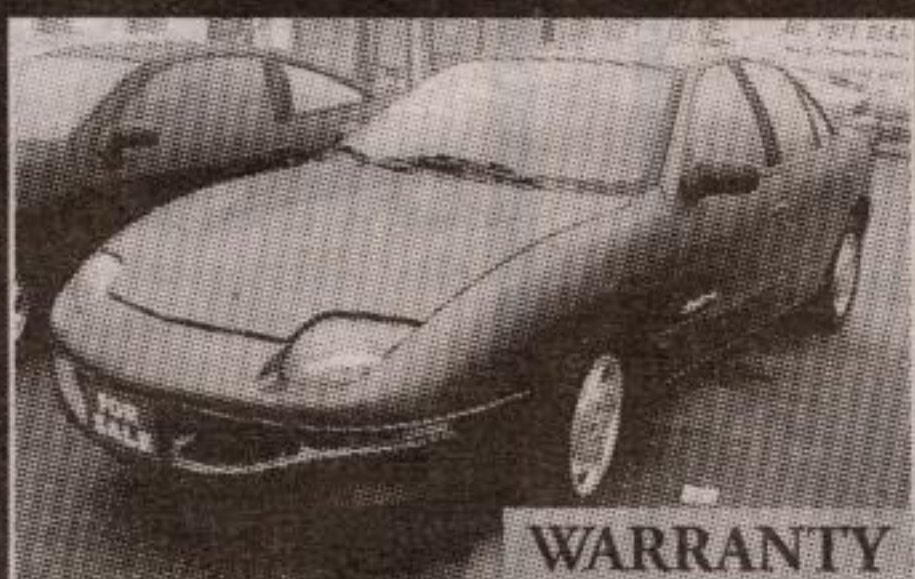
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