



# COMMUNITY

## Gross a Down Syndrome success story

*Young man leads full life despite limitations*

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CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

Every day just after 8 a.m., 21-year-old Jonathan Gross heads out to work. Sure, sometimes he'd rather be playing golf, but at the end of the day he knows the value of a job well done.

Jonathan has Down Syndrome. But that doesn't mean he can't have meaningful employment. Why should it?

For the past six months, Jonathan has been holding down two jobs. He works full-time at Horizon Packaging doing packaging and assembly work, as well as Tuesday afternoons at Matt's Rib House.

In the spring and summer, he works to repair divots — gouges in the turf — at three area golf courses, a job that's right up the golf enthusiast's alley.

He's a hard worker, and his days aren't spent much differently from any other young man finding his place after leaving the school halls behind — which Jonathan did in June.

It's just as his parents, Ron and Sharon, think it should be.

"It's (work) very important for his self-esteem," Ron said, adding, "We're very pleased and proud of him."

### Inspiring story

The Grosses are well aware that Jonathan is a success story of sorts, particularly as he's made his way into the working world. And they're more than happy to share his story if it means giving hope to other parents — possibly new parents — coming to terms with their child having Down Syndrome.

"It's a good life for all of us," Ron said without qualms.

Some of Jonathan's achievements can be attributed to two key organizations — Community Living North Halton (CLNH), which runs Horizon Packaging, and the Halton Down Syndrome Association.

Horizon Packaging is just one of the supports and programs CLNH makes available to children and adults with special needs.

Jonathan gets a paycheque and companies that contract out jobs with Horizon get good work at fair prices.

"They (Horizon) manage to gear the work to each person's individual skills," Ron said.

Jonathan said he has lots of friends at Horizon and that he enjoys his time spent working there.



GRAHAM PAINE / CANADIAN CHAMPION

**PROUD PARENTS:** Sharon and Ron Gross are certainly proud of their son Jonathan, who holds down two jobs despite having Down Syndrome.

He secured his jobs at Matt's and Horizon thanks to co-op placements while at E.C. Drury.

Lately, Jonathan has been taking advantage of a new program offered at Horizon that allows him to continue his education every Monday morning. Right now he's working to improve his math and reading skills.

"People with Down Syndrome learn at a slower pace, but they do learn," Ron said.

Sharon added Jonathan can often be found reading the newspaper at breakfast.

As for the Halton Down Syndrome Association, it's simply always been there for the Grosses, providing support and resources.

The parent-run, non-profit association offers social events for parents and children, a speech and language program, regular parents' meetings and more.

The Grosses found themselves becoming involved with the support group shortly

after Jonathan was born.

The early child intervention program was vital in Jonathan's formative years, his mom said, providing physical and intellectual stimulation.

It's the Gross family's normalcy that's perhaps what's most notable, and what can provide the best example for families struggling under similar circumstances.

They don't hide the fact there are big challenges when it comes to dealing with Down Syndrome — Jonathan had to have heart surgery when he was 15 — but neither do they make any attempt to hide their love and pride when they speak of Jonathan and what he contributes to the family.

The Grosses emphasize they've treated Jonathan the same as their two daughters — requiring chores and good behaviour, no excuses.

Growing up, Jonathan had a paper route that instilled in him early on the value of honest work.

"So ever since he was young, he's been working," Sharon said.

These days, people are more understanding of Jonathan's differences than in the past. Much of that is due to the public seeing people with Down Syndrome out and about.

"They're in the community, not just shoved into institutions," Sharon said.

But there's still more ground to cover when it comes to acceptance, Ron said, adding he encourages people with questions to voice them rather than to go along misinformed.

"Talk to us. Ask me," he said. "Don't think of a person's differences as making them lesser."

For more information about the Halton Down Syndrome Association or Community Living North Halton, visit [www.halton-downsyndrome.com](http://www.halton-downsyndrome.com) or [www.clnh.on.ca](http://www.clnh.on.ca).

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