

Top scholar mixes work, social life

York Region student is 0.2 per cent away from perfection

BY GIANNI COLAVECCHIA
Staff Writer

At first glance, Britta Knight seems like your average teen.

Her smiles convey a youthful mix of contentment and shyness. Her fingers are clasped and fidgeting.

But the nervous exterior belies an inner strength: with an average of 99.8 per cent, the 19-year-old Richmond Hill High School graduate has earned the top academic score this year of any student in York Region.

Sitting in her comfortable Richmond Hill home, Knight shied away from discussing whether she believes her intellect is a cut above other kids.

"I don't really like to talk about it because it seems..." the OAC student began, her words trailing off. "I don't want to seem like I'm bragging."

Knight preferred to talk about the habits she believes have brought her to the top: a healthy social life, hard work and plenty of thorough preparation. Knight also attributes her success to factors such as completing tasks well before the day of an assignment or test.

But Knight, who has earned straight As all her life, also displays a desire for excellence the average student simply does not possess.

"I got a B once in gym, in Grade 7. I wasn't happy about that," she said. "Other kids say it doesn't matter, it's only elementary school or high school. But it matters to me."

Several venues for intellectual stimulation in Knight's home may also provide a clue as to why she has done so well.

Rooms are lined with art and literature.

One bookshelf covers an entire wall, filled with works by authors such as Alice Munro and Mordecai Richler. Major newspapers and magazines are scattered across coffee and kitchen tables.

Knight said her parents read to her when she was a child and she reads for pleasure to this day.

For Knight, the dedication needed to achieve a perfect mark lies in knowing things "inside out" — she will not hesitate to ask questions about the smallest items she's not immediately familiar with — and checking over tests thoroughly, caring even about questions worth only a few marks.

In her quest to become a veterinarian, Knight works part time at a

veterinary clinic, volunteers for a wildlife organization and is to take on a renewable scholarship at the University of Guelph.

Michael Fawcett, an OAC graduate from Cardinal Carter Catholic High School, also keeps himself very busy and has lofty aspirations.

The 18-year-old Newmarket resident, who attributes his final mark of 96.1 per cent to time management, said he hardly has time for idleness in his drive to become an aeronautical engineer.

"I try to go out on weekends with my friends — just not too late, though," he said. "I definitely wish I could go out more. I'll be dying to go out with my friends but I can't."

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Fawcett said most of his after-school life is taken up preparing for and competing in international figure skating competitions. On an average day he awakens at 5:30 a.m., finishes skating around 10:30, attends school until 2:30 p.m., exercises, studies and goes to bed at 9.

He estimated he spends only a half hour per day doing homework, because much of any remaining time is consumed by a part-time job at a country club.

In Grade 12, Fawcett achieved an average of 90 per cent and he left many of his assignments "until the last minute". This year he scored well on consecutive examinations taken without much preparation and only a day after a skating competition in Calgary.

It all begs the question: do some students have an innate ability to outperform despite their study habits?

"I don't know about that. I hope that's true," Fawcett said. "I just try hard, I work hard. I try to apply myself."

Richmond Hill High principal Rod Leonard said he's seen some students do extremely well, even though they cram studying into last-minute work periods before exams.

"I've seen some students who get in the 90s procrastinate," he said. "A lot of bright kids can get away with this."

Success, he acknowledged, can come from a combination of things such as intellectual curiosity and natural aptitude.

For Donna Rowen, Richmond Hill High's head of guidance, students such as Knight and Fawcett are successful because they are efficient learners.



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

Britta Knight, York Region's top OAC student, cuddles with her pet degus. The Richmond Hill High School graduate, who hopes to become a veterinarian, works part time at a vet clinic, volunteers with Wildcare and keeps the South American rodents as pets.

YORK REGION'S TOP 20 SCHOLARS

Name	School	Mark
Britta Knight	Richmond Hill H.S.	99.8
Maria Banda	Thornhill S.S.	99.7
Matthew Benson Lightman	Thornlea S.S.	99.3
Trisha Ann Niemeyer	Sutton District H.S.	98.7
Brynne Redford	Cardinal Carter C.H.S.	98.3
Olivia Pui Ying Lau	Bayview S.S.	98.3
Anthony Collins	Thornlea S.S.	98.2
Nicole Mideo	Huron Heights S.S.	97.8
Matthew Buchalter	Thornlea S.S.	97.8
Susanna Ng	Aurora H.S.	97.7
Joyce Ko	Dr. G.W. Williams S.S.	97.7
Jesse Klostranec	Sacred Heart CHS	97.6
Benjamin Hackett	Dr. G.W. Williams S.S.	97.3
Karina Ng	Markville S.S.	97.2
Jennifer Perruzza	Holy Cross C.A.	97.0
Annida Silverstri	Holy Cross C.A.	97.0
Douglas Hall	Langstaff S.S.	97.0
Henry Ling	Sutton District H.S.	97.0
Ryan Ali	Fr Michael McGivney CHS	96.8
Amelia Ciofani	St. Joan of Arc CHS	96.8

REGIONAL News Digest



WHAT'S HAPPENING

York Regional Police garage sale
Saturday, July 15, 8 a.m.
York Region headquarters
17250 Yonge St., Newmarket

Insp. Greg Saunders, officer Doug Cooper, Joanne Meyer and Lisa Connolly are collecting items for the garage sale to raise funds for the Quiet Food Drive. To make a donation, call 881-1221, ext. 7904.

Chief signs Wamback petition

This morning, Toronto Police Chief Julian Fantino will become the 900,000th person to sign a national petition to change the Young Offenders Act, circulated by the family of a Newmarket teen who was beaten into a coma a year ago.

Fantino, York Region's former chief, will sign the petition at a news conference at the Toronto police union headquarters.

Bruce Davis, president of the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, will also sign the petition.

The petition is part of a campaign by Joe and Lozanne Wamback to toughen the legislation.

Their 16-year-old son Jonathan was severely beaten last summer. Three youths have been charged.

Jonathan, who emerged from a coma after three months but still faces extensive therapy, will be at the news conference.

The Wambacks will also unveil the second phase of their national bus shelter campaign.

The family is hosting a dinner cruise fundraiser tomorrow night on Lake Ontario.

Man killed on Hwy. 404

An 18-year-old man was killed on Hwy. 404 Saturday.

Sebastiano Zappulla was driving his Ford Ranger south when he lost control just south of Stouffville Sideroad at about 3:30 a.m.

He was pronounced dead at the scene.

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		19TH AVE.	